

**VASSALS, SERVANTS AND TRAITORS: IMAGE OF SERBS IN POPULAR  
TURKISH HISTORIOGRAPHY**

by

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## ABSTRACT

### VASSALS, SERVANTS AND TRAITORS: IMAGE OF SERBS IN POPULAR TURKISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Keywords: *Popular Turkish Historiography; Ottoman-Serbian History; Serbs in the Ottoman Empire; Nationalism*

This study is established around the pre-1990 popular historiography in the Turkish Republic with a specific focus on depictions of Serbia and Serbs in the Ottoman Empire. By analyzing the events and characters from both early (i.e. the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) and late Ottoman history, the aim is to understand how the established image(s) of ‘Serbia’ and ‘Serbs’ functions within popular Turkish historiography, a discipline which addresses a considerable portion of the society. This work, in order to achieve a comprehensive historiography survey, consists of the evaluations of the narratives of the authors with diversified political backgrounds. By doing so the thesis strives to understand the similarities and divergences among the authors and thus encourage a comparative discussion of historiography. For the comparison Western and Turkish academical works on Ottoman history, and for the theoretical framework studies regarding Turkish historiography, theories of nationalism were used. As a result, this study offers a broad, representative and yet critical reading of the Turkish historiography on the common histories of the Ottoman Empire and Serbia as well as examples and indications of anachronisms, distortions and instrumentalization of the history.

## ÖZET

### VASALLAR, KULLAR VE HAINLER: POPÜLER TÜRK TARİH YAZIMINDA SIRP İMGESİ

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Anahtar Sözcükler: *Popüler Türk Tarih Yazımı; Osmanlı-Sırbistan Tarihi; Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sırplar; Milliyetçilik*

Bu çalışma 1990 öncesi Türkiye Cumhuriyeti popüler tarih yazıcılığı çerçevesinde, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'ndaki Sırbistan ve Sırplar'a odaklanarak hazırlanmıştır. Buradaki amaç, hem erken hem de geç dönem Osmanlı tarihindeki olayları ve karakterleri inceleyerek, toplumun önemli bir kısmına hitap ettiği düşünülen popüler tarih çalışmalarında ortaya çıkan 'Sırbistan' ve 'Sırp' imgelerini anlamaktır. Bu çalışma, kapsamlı bir tarih yazımı araştırması yapmak amacıyla, çok çeşitli siyasi arkaplanlara sahip yazarların anlatılarının değerlendirilmesinden oluşmaktadır. Bu sayede yazarlar arasındaki benzerlik ve farklılaşmaları anlamak ve ortaya karşılaştırmalı bir tarih yazımı tartışması çıkarmak amaçlanmıştır. Kıyaslama amacıyla Batı'dan ve Türkiye'den Osmanlı tarihi üzerine yapılmış akademik çalışmalar; teorik çerçeve oluşturma amacıyla da Türk tarih yazımı ve milliyetçilik teorileri hakkındaki çalışmalardan faydalanılmıştır. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma Osmanlı-Sırbistan ortak tarihleri hakkında geniş, temsil edici ve eleştirel bir Türk tarih yazımı okuması ve bu yazımdan anakronizm, çarpıtma ve tarihin araçsallaştırılması bulguları ve örnekleri sunmaktadır.

*günüſiđim imruſ'a*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

As the writing and the teaching of the history is one of the most significant issues with regards to the self-identification of a given society, the method of writing, the selection of the issues, usage of the sources and paradigms that shape the perceptions of the historians gains great deal of importance. Therefore; it is no coincidence that most of the states direct and closely monitor the writing and teaching of the history, almost every nation-wide TV channel has a history program in its weekly schedule in Turkey and historical events have been used frequently by the movie producers. This way it could be seen that there is a two-way relation between the writers and consumers in terms of the history where the state's and society's perception and practices interact in a complicated manner.

#### 1.1. Methodological Focus and Delimitations of the Research

In this interaction, which brings about a common understanding of history in the society, Büşra Ersanlı Behar stresses the role of the state and preset official stance as the main determinant factor.<sup>1</sup> In this context the state is extremely influential for the orientation of the historiography and the teaching of the history where some issues are highlighted with an unquestioning attitude and some are ignored. That apparently refers to the usage and modification of the history with a specific political program.

That is not to claim or defend the existence of one and only true version of the history. As Hakan Erdem warns us, a historian should be aware of the differences between the information gained by the history and positive sciences and there could be more than one version and depiction of a particular section of

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<sup>1</sup> Behar, B. E. (1992). *Iktidar ve tarih : Türkiye'de "resmi tarih" tezinin olusumu, 1929-1937*. Cagaloglu, Istanbul: AFA Yayıncılık.

the history as “the history is not the past itself, rather is the collection of the written narratives that came from the mazy roads of human memory.”<sup>2</sup>

On the other side of the interaction, the society’s attitude towards the history is extremely significant as well. Despite the extensive interest to history in the Turkish society, Erdem finds this relationship a very problematic one as most of the people love to talk but not to read, properly learn and question about the history.<sup>3</sup>

It is understood that in the two way relationship of the creation of the historical knowledge, particularly in the Turkish Republic, the questions of “Who writes the history?” and “Who reads what was written?” are extremely valid ones if one wishes to understand the relation between the society and history. Therefore, this thesis was conceptualized in accordance with this relation and took the popular historiography in Turkey as the main informative source which is widely read by the society, reach many people and therefore has extremely significant influence on the understanding of the history. More particularly, in this work the issue and perception of the Serbs and Serbia in the Ottoman era as was held by the popular Turkish historiography is under investigation. In order to achieve this aim, narratives of popular historians from differing backgrounds, on the common histories of the Ottomans and Serbs will be compared not only with themselves but also with the western and academical historiography.

Along with this selection of topic, it has firstly to be underlined that focus will be mainly on the Serbs and Serbia. However, when it is relevant it could be broadened to south Slavs, Croats, Bosnians, Montenegrins, Bulgarians and their lands as well. Also since the issues of the Janissaries and devshirme system in the Ottoman Empire has a lot to do with the Serbs; these two issues in the popular historiography will be in focus as well.

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<sup>2</sup> Erdem, Y. H. (2008). *Tarih-Lenk : kusursuz yazarlar, kâgittan metinler*. Sisli, Istanbul: Dogan Kitap. p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 329.

Secondly, in the selection that constituted the research of this thesis, popular historians and authors that have popular impact for historical knowledge were selected. Therefore, academically written works, examples from western historiography on the history of the Ottoman Empire and their authors were only used for comparison. In addition, it is not however, claimed that the selection signifies an exhaustive list for the popular Turkish historiography. However, utmost sensitivity was shown in order to have a politically representative selection that could lead to a meaningful discussion.

Thirdly, there has to be periodical limitation for this kind of study. The works in question in this thesis were selected from the period that is prior to the end of the Cold War and disintegration of Yugoslavia. By doing this, it is aimed that the negative contemporary influence of the Bosnian War on the historiography could be avoided. Also this time period indicates the historiography that has the greatest impact on the adults of today since it coincides with their youth. Surely, the study of post-1990 historiography for the common Ottoman-Serbian histories could be a very interesting topic for research, especially if compared to this one.

With this introduction, so far, it is evident that there are certain issues that require further discussion for a useful and relevant discussion. The establishment of the official history thesis in Turkey and state's stance regarding the history is vital in the Turkish context. Works by Etienne Copeaux<sup>4</sup> and Būşra Ersanlı Behar<sup>5</sup>, in this regard are of great importance.

Copeaux argues that the state apparatus and dominant political ideology are two extremely determinant elements in terms of the writing of the history and the creation of a common memory of the past for the society. Textbooks, in this sense, are one of the most significant instruments that carry this goal, as they transfer the preferred ideas to the younger section of the society through compulsory education where “a feeling of suspect does not accompany the

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<sup>4</sup> Copeaux, E. (2006). *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında (1931-1993) : Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk-İslâm Sentezine*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

<sup>5</sup> Behar, B. E. (1992). *İktidar ve tarih : Türkiye’de “resmi tarih” tezinin oluşumu, 1929-1937*. Cagaloglu, İstanbul: AFA Yayıncılık.

reading process” mostly.<sup>6</sup> It has to be underlined, as Copeaux further argues, that the common memory of the society is closely related to the discourse in the textbooks.<sup>7</sup> This is exactly why popular historiography carries a similar duty for the society: It could serve as the tool for the reproduction of the history that is taught in the schools, hence; assuring the continuation of the designated common memory of the society.

Copeaux also believe that the historical narratives are useful for the definition of the other and the enemy which is directly related with the identity construction as societies define themselves in relation to and not being the same with the others.<sup>8</sup> After this note, Copeaux informs the readers about his selection of the examples of Arabs, Greeks and Armenians who are the closest to Turks as defining others.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, in this thesis, the image of the Serbs was selected as the defining other who have been close to Turks as well.

As Copeaux writes mainly about the textbooks in order to explain the influence of the state, government and sources of ideological oppression, Büşra Ersanlı Behar too focuses on the establishment of the official history thesis and its integration into historiography. In this regard the First Turkish History Congress that was held in 1932 is significant. According to Behar, the official history thesis that was formulated in this congress had two basic goals: Firstly, establishment of a strong nationalistic conscious that is related with the pre-Ottoman era and, secondly, creating a natural scientific basis for this conscious, such as; archeology.<sup>10</sup> If that is possible to ascribe a final goal for the writing and teaching of the history and if instrumentalization of the history is a state sponsored policy then why not to write selective and functional narratives to reach that goal? This very issue is an extremely sensitive one since “the writing and teaching of the history is one of the most permanent and significant aspects

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<sup>6</sup> Copeaux, E. (2006). *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında (1931-1993) : Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk-Islâm Sentezine*. p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Behar, B. E. (1992). *İktidar ve tarih : Türkiye’de “resmi tarih” tezinin oluşumu, 1929-1937*. p. 12.

of the mind-mapping of a society.”<sup>11</sup> In fact, the ideas that were raised by Copeaux and Behar indicate the significance of this work as well. Similar to the textbooks, here, popular historiography, and the Serbian case in the Ottoman history more particularly, will be in question which has the power of shaping the mind-mapping of the society as well.

Furthermore, it is discussed that French and German romantic and idealist historiography that gained a momentum with the rise of the nation state politics and its relation with history, had a significant impact on the official history thesis that was embraced in the early period of the Turkish Republic. States in the nineteenth and early twentieth century employed their means to, first write a nationalist history and, secondly, to transfer the written history to national collective memory.<sup>12</sup>

While the positivist historiography of the French and the idealist and statist historiography of the Germans were extremely influential on the Turkish historiography in the early republican period, these understandings of the history were being questioned in their homelands as early as the late 19th century. Such as Annales School criticized the positivist approach and advocated for a more interdisciplinary point of view. However, Behar argues that this critical approach to the historiography did not find itself a place in terms of an intellectual tool among the Turkish historians. They simply took historiography as a government policy, rather than a problematic field of thought.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the writing and teaching of the history in Turkey completely became a matter of and tool for national identity building efforts. At this point it is seen that nationalism and historiography is tightly interconnected.

As the issue of nation-building and nationalism were described as one of the main forces behind the history writing in Turkey, it is a must to refer to modern theories of nationalism. Firstly, Anthony Smith suggests that national identity

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<sup>11</sup> Behar, B. E. (1992). *Iktidar ve tarih : Türkiye’de “resmi tarih” tezinin olusumu, 1929-1937*. p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

involves some sense of political community. Accordingly, two paths of formulation could be identified for the nation: the civic and ethnic models. The civic model is predominantly a territorial conception where nations possess a compact and well-defined territory. Regarding the land, Smith argues that it has to be “the historic land, the homeland, the cradle of our people, even where, as with the Turks, it is not the land of ultimate origin.” Furthermore in the ethnic model, that Smith argues, the emphasis is on community of birth and native culture which is mostly valid for Eastern European and Asian conceptions of the nation.<sup>14</sup> Combining elements from both perceptions, Anthony Smith, defines the nation as a “named human population sharing an *historic territory*, common *myths* and *historical memories*, a mass, public *culture*, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members.”<sup>15</sup>

Secondly; Ernest Gellner, argues that nations and nationalisms are not natural but they are rather results of industrialization. According to Gellner, in the industrial societies pressure to combine the state, the population and the culture creates the nations.<sup>16</sup>

Thirdly, in Benedict Anderson’s famous conception, the nation is defined as an imagined political community. As he states, “[i]t is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>17</sup> Although there are many other valuable and recent works that cover the issue of nationalism,<sup>18</sup> it is beyond the capacity of this work to discuss them all in detail.

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<sup>14</sup> Smith, A. D. (1991). *National identity*. Reno: University of Nevada Press. p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, A. D. (1991). *National identity*, p. 14. My italics.

<sup>16</sup> Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

<sup>17</sup> Anderson, B. R. O. (1991). *Imagined communities : reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London; New York: Verso, pp. 6-7.

<sup>18</sup> Anderson, B. R. O. (1991). *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London; New York: Verso; Armstrong, J. A. (1982). *Nations before nationalism*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina Pr.; Breuilly, J. (1994). *Nationalism and the state*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.; Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. ;Hobsbawm, E. J. (1995). *Nations and nationalism since 1870: programme, myth, reality*. Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press.; Hroch, M. (2000). *Social preconditions of national revival in Europe: a comparative analysis of the*

Besides broad theories of nationalism particular cases of nationalisms that relates to the aims of this thesis could be mentioned as well. In this regard, Eugene Weber discusses the French case in his book *Peasants into Frenchmen*, and depicts how “savage” people without ‘language’ (i.e. Parisian French) and culture (i.e. the culture of Paris) became Frenchmen with the civilizing influence of industrialization and education.<sup>19</sup> It is understood that this was perceived as a project, something to be built from scratch, not to polish what already was out there.

Furthermore, Anthony Smith provides the Turkish example in his conception of nationalisms. According to Smith, Kemal Ataturk’s reforms “engineered the secession of the Turkish heartlands from the Ottoman empire” which redefined the empire as a territorial unit that is aligned to ethnic Turks of Anatolia. These efforts, surely, required the creation of certain ethnic myths, history and values.<sup>20</sup>

It could be seen in the conceptions of the nation that there is a great emphasis on the history and concepts that relate to it. Therefore, the selection of the issues, the sources, evaluation of them and the writing, that is the historiography, is one of the most significant issues that define and explain about a nation. In the whole historiography, a special place must be given to the popular historians and their narratives as they could be regarded as the most read ones, hence a very influential section among the authors.

In this regard, it could be very useful to investigate the authors that had a great deal of influence over the contemporary Turkish society with the books they published. The high number of the book sales, their books’ common availability in house libraries, some being statesmen and columnists could be thought as elements to strengthen the idea that they have been influential for shaping the mindset, understanding of the past (i.e. ‘Turkish’ history) and average historical

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*social composition of patriotic groups among the smaller European nations*. New York: Columbia University Press.; Smith, A. D. (1988). *The ethnic origins of nations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

<sup>19</sup> Weber, E. (1976). *Peasants into Frenchmen*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. pp. 4-6.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, A. D. (1991). *National identity*. pp. 103-104.

consciousness of the Turkish society. Eissenstat argues the history and historiography of the Turkish Republic are fundamentally tied to Turkish identity politics. As in all states, the process of nation building and the elaboration of a national history have gone hand in hand.’’<sup>21</sup>

## 1.2. Organization of the Study

Within the theoretical framework that relates to historiography and nationalism, this thesis is structured around the narratives that concern the Serbs and Serbia in the Ottoman era that are found in the popular historiography in the Turkish Republic roughly until 1990s when the region in question suffered bloody wars. By looking into the same events or periods and persons from different authors with differing political backgrounds, a comparison between these authors as well as a general comparison with the academical and western historiography was aimed to be made. As outcomes, it is expected to have a general survey of the Ottoman-Serbian common history, reach to collectively depicted images of the Serbs and Serbia in the Ottoman Empire and compare the political stances of the authors with their narratives within the parameters of popular historiography. Furthermore, only the periods of early (ca. 1350-1500) and late (ca. 1800-1900) Ottoman history was taken into question since these are the periods that Serbs and Serbia were mentioned. The period in between, namely the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is a time that especially popular historians do not refer to Serbs and Serbia in manner that allows for a comparison.

In this regard, the authors in question had to be located onto a range of political orientations. In order to do this orientation Etienne Copeaux’s work<sup>22</sup> and the backgrounds of the authors were used. Collectively, this led to a quadripartite structure: (1) The rightist and nationalist approach, (2) extreme rightist/racist approach, (3) Islamist approach and (4) leftist approach. However; it is important to note that this is a broad generalization and with regards to time,

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<sup>21</sup> Eissenstat, H. (2003). History and Historiography: Politics and Memory in the Turkish Republic. *Contemporary European History*, 12(1), 93–105. doi:10.1017/S096077730300105X, p. 103.

<sup>22</sup>Copeaux, E. (2006). *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında (1931-1993): Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk-İslâm Sentezine*.



political situation and nature of a particular work that a given author wrote, his or her orientation might shift from one to another. Even among the issues that the historian deals with there might be differences in approach and reaction. This problem was tried to be solved through explanatory comments that follows the issue or with the underlining of the significance of the given subject.

In the rightist and nationalist approach the authors are supportive of and/or close to the politics of Democrat Party (DP) and Justice Party (Adalet Partisi – AP). They are in the center right wing of the Turkish politics. In this work Yılmaz Öztuna, Yusuf Akçura and Zuhuri Danişman were evaluated in this framework.

The extreme rightist authors are differentiated from the nationalist ones with the heavy stress on ethnicity and race in their works. İsmail Hami Danişmend and Rıza Nur are the authors in this category.

Islamist authors are defined with their cautious and critical stance in regards to politics of Turkish Republic and principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. More importantly, their emphasis on Islamic values and evaluation of the Ottoman Empire with an Islamic sensitivity are apparent and determinant. Ziya Nur Aksun and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek are regarded in this group.

Finally, the leftist, are the authors, as the name suggests, that are located in the left wing of the politics. In this sense Doğan Avcıoğlu, Stefan Yerasimos, Sina Akşin and Kemal Tahir are the authors that belong to this category. It should be also underlined that, the leftist tradition and authors in Turkey sometimes show characteristics that are similar to nationalists.

In order to achieve a useful comparison and discussion surely right questions has to be asked. For the purposes of this work, questions that were asked are “How Turkish popular historians perceive Serbs and Serbia in the Ottoman history?”, “Are there varying perceptions and ideas regarding this specific issue among the historians?” and “What could be the impact of the political backgrounds of the authors with regards to the writing of the history?”

By asking these questions and keeping the aforementioned theoretical framework in mind, Serbian history in the Ottoman Empire over the works of the popular historians, three chapters were designed in this thesis. The first chapter is concerned with the period of 1350-1475, starting with the first encounter and battle of Serbs with the Ottomans occurred as the beginning and ends with the annexation of Serbia into the Ottoman Empire. The second chapter discusses the whole nineteenth century with regards to Serbia and Ottoman Empire that witnessed the Serbian insurrections, nationalisms and disintegration of the Empire. The third chapter, finally, takes up the issue of prominent Serbian characters in the early Ottoman era. It also includes discussions on the perceptions of the Janissaries and devshirme pashas since it is closely related with the Serbs as being one of the mostly levied societies.

A final note has to be made regarding the usages of the national and ethnic terms as they might be misleading. Kafadar, in this regard, believes that historians have the duty to tackle the nationalistic assumptions and the idea of continuous national identity. He finds the assumptions on the linearity of the Turkishness from Inner Asia to modern day Turkey extremely problematic.<sup>23</sup> Speaking of the Ottoman Empire, both Kafadar and Lowry<sup>24</sup> gives the example of Köse Mihal (Mikhalis the Beardless), “one of the founding fathers of the Ottoman state, a Bithynian Christian who joined forces with Osman”<sup>25</sup> in order to underline the cosmopolitan and multiethnic nature of the Ottoman state right from the beginning. He further states that “[t]he essentialist trap cannot be avoided unless we, the historians, problematize the use of "the Turks" (or any other ethnonym for that matter), systematically historicize it and confront its plasticity, and study its different meanings over time and place”<sup>26</sup> which could be regarded as one of the most critical aspects of the popular historiography in question.

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<sup>23</sup> Kafadar, C. (1996). *Between two worlds : the construction of the Ottoman state*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 23-27.

<sup>24</sup> Lowry, H. W. (2003). *The nature of the early Ottoman state*. Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 117-118.

<sup>25</sup> Kafadar, C. (1996). *Between two worlds : the construction of the Ottoman state*. p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

Therefore the usages of the term ‘Turkish army’ as well as the ‘Serbian army’, for instance, in the fourteenth century become misleading in two aspects. Firstly, as Kafadar argues, with the usage of the national terminology that is being used today a direct continuity and linearity is ascribed to the armies and societies of the fourteenth century and the ones of the nineteenth, even twenty-first centuries. Secondly, this approach, which is derived from the contemporary nation state idea, clearly refers to a unitary and monolithic structure. However; under the conditions of the fourteenth century, the time of fluctuating ties of vassaldom and volatile alliances, the idea of holistic state, army or society seems to be going too far. Regarding the usages of these terms in this work, it has to be said that (1) the terms ‘Turk’ and ‘Turkish’ are frequently kept as they are when borrowed from the popular historiography, in order to stress the problematic common usage and (2) the terms ‘Serb’ and ‘Serbian’ are used for the sake of the simplicity with the discussed critical attitude.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONFRONTATION AND DISSOLUTION: 1350-1475

This chapter is predominantly concerned with the 1350-1475 period which starts with the first encounter of the Ottomans with the Serbs and ends with the complete incorporation of the Serbian lands into the Empire. The transition of the perception of the Serbs follows the track of the ‘equals’ in the political aspirations, to ‘enemies’ to be fought in the struggles for supremacy in the Balkans and then to ‘vassals’ and ‘servants’ as partially or wholly incorporated elements of the empire. It has to be noted that these labellings are broad generalizations and they could overlap at a given time period.

Before going into the narratives of the popular historians, brief introduction of a famous author and his literary work might be beneficial. Kemal Tahir in this regard is not a historian, however; he, being popular and influential for the establishment of the history understanding in the Turkish society with his historical novels, such as; *Yediçınar Yaylası*, *Yorgun Savaşçı* and, surely, *Devlet Ana*<sup>27</sup> is a significant figure. He is also regarded as a leftist writer who is not directly against the Ottoman system. In *Devlet Ana*, where the story of the establishment of the Ottoman principality as a distinct polity is told, it is possible to find information on and references to Ottoman state system and Ottoman settlement in the Balkans, although the actual time frame that the novel does not encompass the abovementioned 1350-1475 period. However; the author obviously knows what will come in the aftermath of the establishment period and uses some dialogues and expressions from the mouth of the main characters, such as; Osman Bey, in order to depict an envisioned state system right from the beginning. These references, occasionally, could be applied to the to-be-incorporated Serbs as well, as they bear the specialty of living in the the west, being christian and a peasant society.

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<sup>27</sup> Kemal Tahir. (1994). *Devlet ana : roman*. Istanbul: Tekin Yayınevi; Kemal Tahir. (2005). *Yorgun savaşçı*. Istanbul: İthaki; Kemal Tahir. (2008). *Yediçınar yaylası*. Istanbul: İthaki.

For instance, Kemal Tahir describes an Ottoman ideal state system over a speech by Osman Bey, which will be applied to the future conquests in the west, that is the Byzantine lands. Osman Bey says:

“Byzantines of Istanbul came from the dark world of the West. But, they could not make use of the slavery system of the Western world here. ... That system is based on the enslavement of the peasantry. Who wants to become slave? So you have to force them continuously! With constant coercion, what happens to a man? He becomes dehumanized! ... We will not shock and frighten the Byzantine the peasants with an alien system! In contrast to slavery, Western pillage, oppression, racism we will provide tolerance, cooperation, safety. Then of course those that work righteously will be with us... This is how the things will work for us.”<sup>28</sup>

The explained ideals and system is the one that that Osman Bey envisages to implement to the Byzantine lands, which are mostly in the Balkans. Therefore the peasants in question should be the Bulgarians, Serbs, Bosnians and the alike.

Furthermore, by making Osman Gazi speak, Kemal Tahir also have references to the societal structure and military composition that the Ottoman state should have. On the societal tolerance, Osman Bey says “We will not plunder! We will not try to spread religion. To the contrary we will respect everyone’s belief. We will not recognize difference among people based on religion, lineage or wealth!”<sup>29</sup> Finally on the military system, he states “Raiders will be picked among the Greeks, because our raids are directed towards Greekness. And these are not raids of burning and plundering but of showing justice and giving trust.” In total, it is possible to understand that, no matter how the practice was afterwards, an ideal of just rule and tolerance as well as incorporation of the Christians into the Ottoman production and military system was perceived. According to the story in Kemal Tahir’s novel, the initial idea was to utilize a multi-ethnic and multi-religious system without making much emphasis to the Turkishness and Islam.

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<sup>28</sup> Kemal Tahir. (1994). *Devlet ana : roman*. pp. 177-178.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 178.

## 2.1. From the First Encounter to the Battle of Kosovo

The first phase of the relations between the Ottomans and Serbs signify a clash between the equally potentially strong states and a growing connection between two regions, namely; north-western Asia Minor and the Balkans.

As a predominant tendency the histories of the Ottoman Empire bear the name Turkish history. A Turkish history that will deal with the Ottoman history usually includes the Turkic populations migration from the central Asia around the fifth century and gives at least brief information on Seljukid Empire right before the emergence of the Ottoman beilik. This is both to do with the intention of providing a comprehensive historical perspective and the legitimacy concerns to some extent which will be focused in the coming chapters.

Since the migration of Turkic populations happened via south and north of the Black Sea and directed towards the Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, at some point they met Slavs and some of the Turkish history books pay attention to this set of events. For instance; one of the leftist Turkish authors in question, Doğan Avcıoğlu in his five volume work *Türklerin Tarihi* (“History of the Turks”) includes this chapter of Turkish History when Avars imposed their rule in the norther Balkans. However in the year 626 khan of the Avars becomes unsuccessful in his campaign on the Slavs and the state loses its influence on them. Czech, Serbs and other Slavic gorups gains independence. Serbs make coalition with Croats to overcome Turks and move southwards and settle to their “contemporary” lands by which Avcıoğlu must have meant Yugoslavia as his book was published in 1987. Also Avar Turks lost their influence over the Slavs of Macedonia and had to pull back as north as modern Hungary, surrounded by hostile Slavs. More importantly, according to Avcıoğlu, Slavization of the Balkans happened due to Avars and their political and military actions. It is also interesting to note that while in Avcıoğlu obviously provides the reader with more detailed information on Bulgars and Magyars as they have Turkic background, on Serbs a little less could be found<sup>30</sup>. Avcıoğlu’s inclusion of early

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<sup>30</sup> Avcıoğlu, D. (1992). *Türklerin tarihi* (Vol. 2). Istanbul: Tekin Yayınevi. pp. 783-793.

Turkic settlements and appearances in the Balkans might be to do with the legitimacy concerns and providing proof for rightful future re-settlements in the coming centuries. Also it should be noted that, regarding the Serbs, this is all that is available in Avcioglu's narrative.

Another writer that belongs to leftist tradition is Stefanos Yerasimos. In his PhD thesis, although not directly about Serbian lands or people, there are explanations regarding the dynamics of the Balkan lands and the Ottoman rule that is being established starting from the second half of the fourteenth century onwards. According to Yerasimos, "the conquest and colonization of the Balkan lands" was not a single-handedly controlled phenomena from Bursa, rather it was due to the ambitions of the *ghazi beys* ("Muslim warrior lords") and Anatolian war lords who wanted to gain more incomes and land, hence more fiefs. It is important to note here that Yerasimos does not make distinction between the war lords according to their ethnic background as some of them were Christian converts from *Rum* and Serbian territories. These people by forcing north-west into the Balkans, were transforming and defining wealth and resources in the region. One other advantage for the beys to do so was actually the fact that the more they pushed further towards north-west the less control could be imposed upon them by the center who was willing to design the new lands in accordance with their class based interests.<sup>31</sup> With this approach Yerasimos is a distinctive figure among the historians, both for leftist and rightist ones. Instead of giving an event based political history, as many others do, he uses the economical aspect and class as the basis of argumentation. Furthermore; Yerasimos underlines that besides the economic ambitions, religious *tarikats* ("sufi orders") and sheikhs were another significant supporting element for Ottoman expansion in the Balkans yet this must predominantly be related with regions like Albania, Bosnia and Macedonia. In my research I have not come across to any reference to Islamic religious settlements in the Serbian territories.

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<sup>31</sup> Yerasimos, S. (2001). *Azgelismislik sürecinde Türkiye: 1. Bizans'tan Tanzimat'a*. (B. Kuzucu, Trans.). Istanbul: Belge yayinlari. p. 199. ["Turkey in the Process of Underdevelopment: From Byzantium to Tanzimat"]

### 2.1.1. Dušan and Orhan

Roughly after 1330s, with Dušan's succession to Serbian throne as a successful commander and law maker, Serbian Kingdom became the most significant and organized political power in the Balkans. It is understood that Dušan perceived Ottoman state as a serious rival that his interests could contradict, he offered his daughter Teodora to Orhan in order to achieve Ottoman neutrality.<sup>32</sup> However his efforts did not eventually yield the result he expected.

Moving towards right in the spectrum of Turkish historians and authors, İsmail Hami Danişmend is one of the most significant characters that is recognized and read popularly. In his four volume *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi* ("Chronology of Ottoman History with Explanations") he deals with the issues choronologically and it is possible to extract great deal of information on Serbian history that relates the Ottomans. Although not physical, the first encounter of the Ottomans with Serbs goes back to *Üsküdar Mülakatı* ("Meeting of Üsküdar") that was done between John V Cantacuzenus and Orhan Ghazi where Byzantine emperor secured some Ottoman support in his dealings with the Serbian King Dušan.<sup>33</sup> At the time of Dušan Serbian Kingdom was on the rise and harming the Byzantine interests by capturing or plundering Byzantine fortresses and towns the *Rumelia*. Without further explicit explanation, it is still easy to understand Ottomans used some military sources against the rising Serbian Kingdom from the onset in Danişmend's history.

On this same subject Yılmaz Öztuna, too, pays much attention. Three important themes are significant in his writing on the nature of the states. First is that the Serbian Kingdom with their succesful leader Stefan Dušan was expanding politically and financially at the expense of Byzantine Empire's lands in the southern Balkans especially into Macedonia. Secondly, the capture of İznik and Bursa, two important trade and production centers in the region, was another sign of Byzantine decline who was deprived from rich tax resources and the

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<sup>32</sup> Kunt M. in Aksin, S. (Ed.). (2005). *Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 2). Istanbul: Cem Yayınevi. p. 43.

<sup>33</sup> Danismend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 1). Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi. p. 25.



emergence of Turkish principality as a serious power base. Finally, Turks<sup>34</sup> as a rising power base with a stable military force and expanding economy was a potential ally for both Orthodox ruler, one defensive and other that was at the attack. It was Byzantium who Orhan Bey decided to support eventually. This decision was a natural and simple one according to Öztuna, as he argues that it was completely in contradiction for the Turkish politics to support the establishment of a powerful Slavic state in the Balkans.<sup>35</sup> Kunt, too, stresses that it would be dangerous for the Ottomans not to check Serbian imperial expansion towards south and counter-balance her by supporting the weak Byzantine Empire.<sup>36</sup>

There are several outcomes that could be deduced from Öztuna's approach to alliance issue. To advance towards the north-west into the Balkans and control the lands was of primary importance in Ottoman strategy right from the beginning and this was a planned act. Balkans is a land to be settled. Secondly, and more interestingly, there can be found many references to Slavic solidarity, Slavic danger<sup>37</sup> and a common will among the Slavic people and rulers to act together. Although this approach's explanatory power is obvious; it is also important to keep in mind that such an early Slavic solidarity could be premature and carry the traces of the bitter memories of the nineteenth century Ottoman retreat from her Balkan lands due to Panislavism and European politics. Thirdly, with the *Üsküdar Mülakatı* in the year 1347 Orhan have the military power and confidence to promise for help to his father-in-law in his struggles within the empire and against the Serbian danger. Finally; in Öztuna's history it is observed that while Ottomans could be moderate about the neighboring Byzantine Empire and there are ups and downs in the relations, the case for Serbian Kingdom is clear cut as simply being antagonistic. This makes the reader feel that the

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<sup>34</sup> Yılmaz Öztuna predominantly prefers the term Turks than the Ottomans throughout his book. Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi*. İstanbul: Ötüken Nesriyat.

<sup>35</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 2). pp. 271-273.

<sup>36</sup> Kunt M. in Aksin, S. (Ed.). (2005). *Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 2). İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi. p. 43.

<sup>37</sup> Öztuna mentions about the Orhan-Cantacuzenus alliance and its anti-Serbian nature in detail. In this regard Öztuna says "müşterek saydıkları Slav tehlikesine karşı takip etmeleri gereken siyasetin esas noktaları üzerinde mutabık kalmışlardı". *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 2) p. 272.

Ottomans in this period locate themselves over being anti-Serbian and anti-Slavic in their acts in the western border. Emphasize on the collaboration with Byzantines and the scarcity of information that was given regarding the Bulgarians could be translated as Öztuna ascribes specific importance to Serbian-Ottoman rivalry. This becomes clearer when a comparison is made between the states that the Ottomans and Ottoman war lords marched on. A rivalry and hostility could be one solution to define a newly established state as it has been the case for Turkish Republic as well.

### 2.1.2. *Sırpsındığı* and Martisa (Çirmen): Myth and Reality

Regarding the first significant combat that was narrated in the Turkish history books between the Ottomans and the Serbs, the *Sırpsındığı* Battle, there is a controversy whether that was actually the same one with the allegedly following Maritsa Battle of 1370/71 or there were two battles fought in six years time. Turkish historians have differing ideas about the issue.

Recently Alexandar Şopov tried to answer this question by going over the Ottoman, Greek and Slavic sources in his thesis<sup>38</sup>. Main argument on the subject is that the only open-field battles and victories against a large enemy forces in the fourteenth century that was narrated in the Ottoman sources are *Sırpsındığı* of 766/1364 and Kosovo that took place in 791/1389. Slavic and Greek sources likewise indicate that two major battles of the second half of the fourteenth century are the Battle of Maritsa (*Meriç*) River (*Çirmen Savaşı* in Turkish) in 1371 and Kosovo Battle of 1389.<sup>39</sup> This comparison between the two lines of historiography shows an interesting point and a significant confusion.

Likewise, Hakan Erdem underlines that the western historians that rely on Slavic sources concur regarding the singularity of the fight, namely the Battle of

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<sup>38</sup> Sopov, A. (2007). *Falling like an autumn leaf: the historical visions of the battle of the Maritsa-Meriç River and the quest for a place called Sırp Sındığı*. Sabanci University, Istanbul.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 41.

Maritsa in 1371.<sup>40</sup> It has to be stressed that although some hesitation could be observed in narratives of some historians, such as; Danişmend,<sup>41</sup> the idea of two separate battles, especially with the help of the history textbooks for middle and highschools, still lives in the minds of too many Turkish people. That goes without saying that the Battle of Sırpsındığı is not accepted in the scholar historiography, just like western historiography as Hakan Erdem argues.

İsmail Hami Danişmend is one of the Turkish historians that has the critical view on the subject. He believes that in the Ottoman sources there is a confusion about these two wars in most cases which are under the influence of some legends that cannot be trusted.<sup>42</sup> Although Danişmend seriously considers the possibility that two wars could actually be the same he prefers to give in his chronologic work two wars as separate ones that took place in 1364 and 1371. In the Battle of *Sırpsındığı*, it is Hacı İlbey's expeditionary force of 10.000 soldiers that made a sudden attack to kill and scatter the most of the forces of the Hungarian King Lajos I (Louis I of Hungary), Serbian King Stefan Uroš V, Bosnian King Tvrtko I and Vlahian princes Bassarab and Lajko at night. Although critical and doubtful himself, Danişmend narrates a separate battle that took place in 1371, where Ottoman army led by Lala Şahin Pasha met Macedonian/Serbian despot Uglješa's and Bulgarian King Šišman's armies to "completely crush" them in Samako Valley. In this "terrific defeat" that Serbian forces faced Dušan's all three sons were killed.<sup>43</sup> After these wars that Ottomans were victorious and gain superiority in the region, it is mentioned that no significant power is left to stand against the Ottomans in Macedonia and southern Serbia.

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<sup>40</sup> Erdem, Y. H. (2008). *Tarih-Lenk : kusursuz yazarlar, kâgittan metinler*. p. 161. Y. Hakan Erdem refers to Fine, J. V. A. (1994). *The Late Medieval Balkans* (Vol. 2). Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, p. 379-382 and Imber, C. (1990). *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1481*. İstanbul: Isis, p. 29 as examples from western historiography.

<sup>41</sup> Danismend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 1). p. 43.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 43.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 52.

Further, Danişmend explains that rapid expansion and conquests besides the significant battles were achieved due to successes of the *akindjis* (“raiders”) who were around 70 or 80 thousand cavalry men and they were predominantly of Turk race.<sup>44</sup> Unlike the notion that is adopted by the scholarly history studies, such as; Finkel<sup>45</sup>, Barkey<sup>46</sup> and Lowry<sup>47</sup>, the Ottomans are not Ottomans but Turks and their military power is not a coalition of Anatolian Turkish soldiers, converts or Christians from Byzantine Empire and to some extent Bulgarian and Serbian realms but almost purely Turks in Danişmend’s narrative. This historical understanding could be felt in most nationalist authors’ histories but usually not as clear as Danişmend in most cases. In addition, the issue of coalition and cosmopolitan nature of the Ottoman polity surely is a significant one and will be dealt in more detail in chapter III

The Battle of *Sırpsındığı*, according to Rıza Nur was fought against the 4000 Ottoman soldier that was led by Hacı İlbey and an alliance of Bulgarian, Bosnian, Albanian and mostly Serbian army of 60.000. In the end allied forces were “annihilated” and Kavala, Drama and Niş were captured.<sup>48</sup>

In the second grouping of Turkish historians, well-known Yılmaz Öztuna writes an Ottoman history in his fourteen volume work *Büyük Türkiye Tarihi* (“Great History of Turkey”) in detail. Before coming to *Sırpsındığı* Battle, he names other encounters of Ottomans with the Serbs. Firstly, Süleyman Pasha saves Salonika from falling into Serbian hands with his army of 20.000 men in 1349. This is the first physical encounter of the two armies. After this success, Orhan declined the “mighty” Serbian King Dušan’s proposal who wanted to form an alliance against the Byzantine Empire which led to the second battle. In the year 1352 near Dimetoka and by the River Maritsa Süleyman Pasha again were

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<sup>44</sup> Danişmend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 1). p. 54. Danişmend writes “Umumiyetle Türk ırkındandır” regarding the raiders.

<sup>45</sup> Finkel, C. (2005). *Osman’s dream : the story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923*. London: John Murray.

<sup>46</sup> Barkey, K. (2008). *Empire of difference : the Ottomans in comparative perspective*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>47</sup> Lowry, H. W. (2003). *The nature of the early Ottoman state*.

<sup>48</sup> Rıza Nur, & Kiliç, E. (1978). *Türk tarihi* (Vol. 3) Istanbul: Toker Yayinlari. p.164.

victorious against King Stefan Dušan and allied Bulgarians to save Edirne.<sup>49</sup> Öztuna refers specifically to this Serb-Bulgarian alliance as a Slavic flood to threaten the Byzantine Empire which completely endangers the future plans of Orhan Bey. On the other side, it is seen that Dušan was well aware of the Ottoman danger.

To go into some details that Öztuna provides for the reader, when a Serbian danger identified by the reign of Stefan Dušan is mentioned, it is about a ruler who is respected in his realm, commanding an army of 80.000 and started to threaten Constantinople from his capital Skopje. He foresaw that the Ottomans will use even more control over the region in the future and wanted to keep Orhan Bey neutral against the Byzantine Empire by offering his daughter to one of Orhan's sons. Öztuna repeatedly indicates that this would completely be against the Ottoman interests to "drive Byzantium into the hands of the Slavs" which could even cost Ottoman sovereignty in the region as well.<sup>50</sup> Although there are three states that are seemingly balanced and in a political power struggle, in fact Ottomans and Serbian Kingdom had the great potential to rise while Byzantines were on a swift decline. Therefore Ottomans in the fourteenth century seems to be a state that stands against the "Slavic danger" with all political and military acts possible in Öztuna's narrative. It is possible to observe this mentality in author's concepts of danger and cooperation. However, this Serbian danger disappeared with the sudden death of the King Dušan and his state was divided among the claimants.

Furthermore in Öztuna's history the two wars that were mentioned as controversial in historiography were definitely taken separately without any doubt brought to attention as some authors; such as İsmail Hami Danişmend, preferred. In the "Victory of *Sırpındığı*" (1364) the army consisted of Serbian, Bosnian, Hungarian and Vlahian soldiers, "provoked" by the Pope, were defeated by the force of 10.000 men commanded by Hacı İlbey. Since the army of Murad I was in Bursa and Crusaders advanced quickly Edirne was in serious

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<sup>49</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 2). p.273.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p.277. "Bizans'ı Slavların kucağına atmak"

danger. This is why Hacı İlbey acted heroically and made a sudden night attack to either kill or push the enemy into the River Maritsa who was drunk and asleep.<sup>51</sup> Öztuna, while not indicating the number of the coalition forces, uses the word *victory* in the title, names this coalition as a Crusade and underlines that this is a result of the Pope incitements.

Regarding the Victory of Maritsa (*Çirmen Zaferi*) Öztuna writes that seven years after the *Sırpsındığı*, Europe tried her luck with a second crusade but this time with more Serbian soldiers involved. As the result, Serbian commander King Vukašin was killed and the Turks could advance deep into the Macedonian territories. Here too, he writes, the people were waiting for the Turks to install a new rule since the Serbian rule was even worse than the Byzantine rule.<sup>52</sup> Regarding the formation of the armies unlike any other historian Öztuna believes that the Pope called for a crusade against the advancing Turkish armies. However, Finkel thinks that formation of the Christian army that fought at the Battle of Maritsa was due to the will of the Orthodox landlords and their uneasiness with the Ottoman advancement, unlike the Pope who is the religious leader of the Catholic world. In the end the Battle of Çirmen that was fought on the Maritsa River constituted a disaster for the Serbian lords who caused the battle in the first place. Defeated Serbian lords and three rulers of Bulgaria became Ottoman vassals.<sup>53</sup>

In order to make a comparison between the nationalist/right wing historians' narratives and a scholarly written one, Metin Kunt writes about the battles of *Sırpsındığı* in 1364 and *Çirmen* in 1371 as separate ones as well. However what he is being critical is not the dates but the nature of these wars. For him these were successful battles of defense for the Ottomans against Balkan alliances, rather than offensive campaigns for the extermination of their Christian adversaries as *all* of the Turkish writers in question depicted. Actually in this period, according to Kunt, Ottoman power is not very stable and there is a

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<sup>51</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 1). p.286.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p.288.

<sup>53</sup> Finkel, C. (2005). *Osman's dream : the story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923*. p. 18.

balance of powers in the region. It is only after 1380s that Ottomans feel more comfortable and are on the attacking side.<sup>54</sup>

To sum up the chapter, Öztuna asks the question “who were to stop the Turks’ conquests in the Balkans?”. Since Murad I took cities like Edirne, Lüleburgaz, Çorlu, Malkara, İpsala, Dimetoka, Plovdiv in twenty five years time Ottomans were on a speedy rise. As an answer he says that Byzantine Empire had already failed to stop them. Serbs and Bulgarians were not seeming as powerful as they were at the time of Orhan Bey. One possibility could be the Hungarians. However since they are Catholics and have been using pressure in order to force the Orthodox Christians to convert, they were not to be welcomed in the Serbian and *Rumeli* territories. Therefore the balance of powers he once mentioned was gone forever in favor of the Ottomans. Another factor that makes Ottoman conquests quick is the fact that people of the Balkans were hoping for a new regime in the region to give them the prosperous life they have been looking for. Turks were being expected as saviors and Orthodox Christians of the region could not be provoked by any other state to rebel against them.<sup>55</sup>

In the conception that Öztuna offers to his readers regarding the Ottoman conquest in the Balkans there are two issues problematic and worth considering. Firstly; the very idea of provoking the people against an empire seems to be derived from the 19<sup>th</sup> century history, hence an anachronic approach could be visible here. Secondly; there is the idea of Hungarian provokation of the people of the Balkans before the conquest of these lands.<sup>56</sup> That is to say, the anxiety about the Hungarian provokation, openness of the Balkan Christians to this provokation and tendency to rebel and their preference of playing a nationalistic game instead of fighting directly as a state against the Ottomans could be a result of the author’s amalgamation of the ideas of 19<sup>th</sup> century with the events of the fourteenth century. In terms of reproduction and recreation of the history, the author’s contemporary recognition of the events has a great influence. Thirdly;

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<sup>54</sup> Kunt, M. in Aksin, S. (Ed.). (2005). *Türkiye tarihi*. p. 51.

<sup>55</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 2). p.285.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p.285.

Öztuna in his narrative completely ignores the existence of other socioethnic groups as actors within the Ottoman state. They are Turks that capturing cities, Turks that fight in the borderline as *akindjis* and succesful Turkish commanders that lead the armies. However, it is indicated by recent historians that right from the beginning Ottoman ruling class formed as a coalition of Muslims Turks and former Byzantine Christians or converts.<sup>57</sup> People from a wide range of social groups were added into this coalition as the state turned into an empire, which will be argued in the coming chapters.

Ziya Nur Aksun, widely read islamist/nationalist historian, specifically identifies the Ottoman conquest with the benefits for the Balkan Orthodox population as the establishment of Islamic rule. In order to achieve the advancement towards the north-west Murad I carried out well-planned and specific preparations.<sup>58</sup> Kunt and Aksun agree on the idea that *Rumeli* was not a land to plunder but a land to expand and settle.<sup>59</sup>

Aksun futher explains *Sırpsındığı* Battle as the fight between the Ottomans and the Crusaders prepared by the Orthodox ruling elite who started to lose their incomes. At the time, Christian Orthodox locals were living an unprecedented prosperous and comfortable life due to the fair Ottoman rule and here happy to the degree that would never think about an uprising against the Ottoman rule. This Crusader army of 60.000-100.000 soldiers were attacked by Hacı İlbey's 10.000 soldiers while they were got drunk during the night. These infidels were killed and in that chaos some even did kill their own fellows.<sup>60</sup> As a result, parts of Serbia and Bulgaria and the Raguza Republic entered Ottoman control. A special attention given to Raguza by Aksun in his narrative as he states that this tiny republic stayed under "our" control until 1829, had a very prosperous life

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<sup>57</sup> Lowry, H. W. (2003). *The nature of the early Ottoman state*. Albany: State University of New York Press.; Kafadar, C. (1996). *Between two worlds: the construction of the Ottoman state*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>58</sup> Ahmet Hilmi Sehbenderzade, 1865-1913, & Aksun, Z. N. (2006). *İslâm tarihi* (Vol. 3) Istanbul: Ötüken Nesriyat. p. 19.

<sup>59</sup> Kunt, M. in Aksin, S. (Ed.). (2005). *Türkiye tarihi*. p. 49.

<sup>60</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (1994). *Osmanli tarihi : Osmanli devleti'nin tahlilli, tenkidli siyasi târihi* (Vol. 1). Istanbul: Ötüken Nesriyat A.S. p. 55.



and it took only few years after the Ottoman retreat from Ragusa to occur a decline in incomes and population.<sup>61</sup> Regarding the issue, on the other hand, Kunt argues that they only paid a yearly tribute and never got under the Ottoman control.<sup>62</sup> Apparently political thinking through the concept of rebellion and uprising is a could be perceived as a common theme among the Turkish historians who were deeply influenced by the loss of the Balkans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Aksun too supports this approach. It is also very visible that the author stresses the new Islamic rule's tolerant and prosperous nature to provide much better conditions for the Orthodox people of the region unlike the contemporary Catholic or Orthodox ruling elites.

### 2.1.3 Struggle in Anatolia - 1387

After the defeats that allied armies led by Serbian commanders faced against the Ottoman forces considerable number of land lords turned into Ottoman vassals. Their vassaldom required them to send soldiers when needed. This is actually an interesting theme as the Ottomans started to use Christian soldiers for all kinds of military purposes, meaning towards the Christian west and Muslim east. It could be useful to bring the histories that indicated the usage of Christian soldiers especially against the Karamanoğlu principality in 1387 together.<sup>63</sup>

In this regard Rıza Nur argues that Karamanoğlu principality declared war in an effort to take the advantage that Ottomans were occupied with the Rumeli region. Ottomans, including their vassal Serbian forces fought a bloody battle against the Karamanoğlu. He does not mention about an alliance between the Serbs and Karamanoğlu principality. He also suffices to write that Serbian soldiers were punished for being disobedient to orders without giving any further detail.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (2006). *İslâm tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 19.

<sup>62</sup> Kunt, M. in Aksin, S. (Ed.). (2005). *Türkiye tarihi*. p. 61.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>64</sup> Rıza Nur, & Kiliç, E. (1978). *Türk tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 165.

Kunt indicates that Murad I with his vassal Byzantine, Serbian and Bulgarian forces marched to Konya where Alaaddin Ali of Karamanoğlu had claims over the Ottoman territories that were bought some time ago.<sup>65</sup> İnalçık instead names the allied forces as the Byzantines, Serbian despot and other Serbian lords, indicating a fragmented structure between the despot and lords in an unstable Serbia.<sup>66</sup>

It is understood from the narrative of Danişmend that Lazar Grebliyanović was tied with duties of vassaldom to Ottomans in 1372 and with heavier conditions in 1375, yet he “has not given up on his Turkish enmity for a single second”.<sup>67</sup> Despite this Turkish enmity, interestingly, he collaborates with Karamanoğlu, according to Danişmend. The reason for the clash between two “compatriot armies” in Konya was given as the Lazar’s provocation which led to Karamanoğlu attack to a Hamidoğlu town that was recently bought by the Ottomans. In return, Murad I supported his army with his vassals from Byzantium, Serbia and Bulgaria and attacked to Konya.<sup>68</sup> With this information, it is understood that Karamanoğlu collaborates with the Serbian king who actually an Ottoman vassal and they cause synchronically problems to Ottomans from each side of the border. Also Ottomans gather an army that has Serbian elements in it, who are likewise the vassals. With the nature of the alliances that were formed, fragmented structure of Serbian realms at the time could be observed. That is to say, it is somewhat arbitrary to ascribe nation-state specialties and clear-cut boundaries for the polities of the late fourteenth century where drastic changes in alliances could occur in short periods of time with the extremely fragmented political structures.

Finally Danişmend mentions that due to the plunder that the Serbian soldiers did in Konya they were heavily punished by the Ottomans and some were executed.

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<sup>65</sup> Kunt, M. in Aksin, S. (Ed.). (2005). *Türkiye tarihi*. p. 52.

<sup>66</sup> Inalcik, H. (2007). *Osmanli Imparatorlugu klasik çag (1300-1600)*. (R. Sezer, Trans.). Istanbul: Yapı Kredi. p. 20.

<sup>67</sup> Danismend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 1). Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi. p. 75.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. pp. 71-72.

This event is told to be the one of the reasons for Serbs to rebel and the famous Battle of Kosovo which will take place in 1389.

It is a fact that Murad's rapid conquests in the north-west led to subordination of the Byzantine Palaiologos princes and many Serbian lords. Ottomans showed little hesitation to utilize the soldiers that came from Christian realms against the Anatolian Turcoman principalities. However it could be guessed that both within and out of the Ottoman society there was a shared discontent with the situation. According to Vatin, as an answer to the issue of execution and punishment of the Serbian soldiers in Konya, Murad first made Alaaddin Bey subordinated and then let him continue to stay and rule in his territories. This act while causing alleviation among the Muslim Anatolian population and elites, on the other hand deprived the Serbian soldiers from an expected booty and reward. As a result frustrated Serbian soldiers plundered the civil population in Konya. Vatin takes the severe punishments of Murad I towards the Serbian soldiers as a reason for hatred against the Ottoman rule and catalyst for the Battle of Kosovo.<sup>69</sup>

Not only about the struggle between the Ottomans and Karamanoğulları, but almost on every subject that relates to the Serbs, Nicolas Vatin is the historian with most details and explanations. He clearly indicates that in the 1380s the usage of Christian soldiers derived from mostly Serbian vassals against the Turk and Muslim armies and principalities were not approved by the Ottoman society and probably by some of the ruling elite. Thus, there is very little information and detail in the Turkish sources regarding this issue.<sup>70</sup>

This is actually a significant theme that most of the Turkish authors ignored in their histories. The reasons for this kind of attitude may vary. Most probably they either did not consider this fact to be plausible, or were unwilling to include it into historical narrative, which would violate Islamic or nationalistic sensibilities.

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<sup>69</sup> Vatin, N. in Mantran, R. (1999). *Osmanli Imparatorlugu tarihi*. (S. Tanilli, Trans.) (2nd ed., Vol. 1). Istanbul: Adam Yayinlari. p. 52.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 51.

Besides the ones that have been mentioned, there are several other issues that require critical attention with regards to Turkish historians' approach. For instance it could be observed that one nationalist author, Yılmaz Öztuna and another Islamist Ziya Nur Aksun repeatedly stress that the idea of Slavic solidarity is one of the most significant problem that Ottomans faced during the late fourteenth century. It seems to be a reflex rather than an analysis for the right wing historians to ascribe Slavic solidarity a decisive role in the politics at such an early this period whose mindsets were haunted by the terrible legacy of the 19th century Panislavism.

Another issue to be pointed out is the political structure of Serbia that is depicted through the history books for the reader. Finkel describes the Serbia between the years 1350 and 1400 as a time of vassals and petty ruler.<sup>71</sup> This approach is both useful to explain the power vacuum in the post-Dušan period specifically and also, in general terms, suitable with the *zeitgeist* as the middle ages symbolizes a fragmented political structure in many parts of Europe. Turkish historians on the other hand introduce the strongest lord as the despot, prince or the ruler of whole Serbia to their readers. This might be a result of a very dominant unitary state perception of contemporary Turkey which could easily misled the authors as a paradigm to miss to grasp the nature of the feudal struggle between the lords without a central authority in modern sense.

There is a shared understanding and agreement in Ottoman defeat and heavy losses in Pločnik in 1388 by mainly Serbian forces among the historians from all the traditions. This is also regarded as the reason for Murad I to prepare a decisive campaign towards the Serbian land which will lead to famous Battle of Kosovo of 1389.

## **2.2. Enemies to Allies: Battles of Kosovo (1389) and Ankara (1402)**

In the aftermath of the Battle of Kosovo an empire and a rule over the Balkan vassal lords was established. However, it was still true that these lords were

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<sup>71</sup> Finkel, C. (2005). *Osman's dream : the story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923*. p. 20.

ready to take any opportunity to fight back.<sup>72</sup> It will only be possible to completely impose sovereignty in the region during the time of Mehmed II who would destroy these little dynasties to connect the Rumeli directly to *Dersaadet*.

The process of gradual integration of the Balkan lands to the Ottoman center mainly took place as a result of the battles that were fought by the Ottoman army in the fourteenth century as many historians that are in our scope explain. Stefanos Yerasimos on the other hand provides his readers a broader, more economy based and conceptual idea of how the transformation in the Balkans occurred, surely with a leftist perception. The situation before the Ottomans was explained as a struggle between a feudal ruling class that has the tendency to collaborate with the Catholic West and the people who were being oppressed in order to make them serfs. Although this struggle was an Orthodox-Catholic clash in the eyes of the people, the true nature of the fight for the Balkans was to determine the productive activities. Furthermore, in terms of the Ottoman mentality the Balkans provided supply of grains with the endless fertile valleys and silver with the Novo Brdo silver mines in Serbia.<sup>73</sup> In this case the conqueror Ottoman Empire's interests seem to be in line with the Bulgarians, Serbs and other people of the region. That is to say that Yerasimos explains the story not mainly with Ottoman military successes or Islamic tolerance but rather with economical structures and determinism.

### **2.2.1. The Battle of Kosovo**

The Battle of Kosovo in 1389 is widely thought as *the* decisive moment for all the Ottoman, Balkan and Serbian histories that were written in modern times. The Battle of Kosovo's correspondence with the nationalistic images, themes and ideas brought about a rich historical narrative composed around it. Killing of sultan Murad I, King Lazar, Miloš are all very intriguing events that were taken up by the historians. It is interesting to observe the language and the discourse

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<sup>72</sup> Inalcik, H. (2007). *Osmanli Imparatorlugu klasik çağ (1300-1600)*. (R. Sezer, Trans.). p.19.

<sup>73</sup> Yerasimos, S. (2001). *Azgelismislik sürecinde Türkiye: 1. Bizans'tan Tanzimat'a*. p. 366.

picked by the historians from all ideological backgrounds. Maybe no other event in the early period of Ottoman history could give more ideas about the historiography and the historians. This battle, of which every historian has many things to say, gives tools for comparison and could be used as a litmus paper for the republican era historiography of Turkey.

İsmail Hami Danişmend in this regard, is a historian that highlights the nationalistic elements both on Ottoman and Serbian sides. Surely the whole historical and literary legacy behind this battle helps making the event inevitably look as a significant national moment in the history. But also with the author's choice, the selection of words and depiction of the events indicate that it is not mere written in terms of a history of two armies' clash, but rather as a heroic narrative full of excitement and feelings. First of all, in Danişmend's history it could be understood that the term Serbia refers to the land that encompasses modern day Serbia, Kosovo and northern Macedonia, ruled by the Serbian king and his voivodes. Yet it is unknown whether this is his idea or a borrowed concept from the western sources. The main reason for Serbian led allied forces to lose the battle was given as the betrayal and retreat of the Voivode of Kosovo and son-in-law of the King Lazar, Vuk Brankovic in Danişmend's history. Prince Bayezid's successful maneuvers in the field and this betrayal brought about the result of the battle. In Danişmend's words:

“under these circumstances were the allies unable to resist any longer and began to flee in a chaotic way; while these lost their lives through Turkish sword, was the general commander of the allied forces and Serbian King Lazar Grebliyanović taken prisoner together with his entourage, consisting of his lords, as well as his military unit consisting of one thousand soldiers.”

This is the depiction of the battle field's situation for the Serbs. The fate of King Lazar also gains much attention from the author. He provides all three possible endings for his story. He was either executed in front of Sultan Murad as a rebel who actually should have acted as his loyal vassal, or his head was cut by prince Bayezid during the battle, or saved himself by offering his sister to Bayezid.

However the last one, according to Danişmend cannot be true since it is certain that he did not survive the Battle of Kosovo.<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, the *Victory of Kosovo* caused the death of the victorious Turkish ruler as well. There are various accounts regarding his death. Danişmend mainly considers two possibilities: either during or after the battle by a Serbian hero with a poisonous dagger who pretended to convert to Islam and *kiss the foot* of the “great Turkish soldier”.<sup>75</sup>

In the aftermath of the Kosovo Battle, the new sultan Bayezid showed a great political ability and mature attitude, argues Danişmend. Instead of crushing the whole Serbia, he calmly tied the princes himself as vassals who would loyally fight alongside him in Bosnia, Nicopolis and Ankara. With the same arrangement Bayezid married Olivera Despina, the princess of Serbia.<sup>76</sup> Although on the one hand Danişmend believes that Serbian loyalty was significant and beneficial especially in the military support, on the other hand he blames “this Serbian girl’s entrance to the Ottoman palace, meant the entrance of alcohol and debauchery as well” which turned out to be a great disaster and the start of foreign (“ecnebi”) influence in the palace.<sup>77</sup>

Another author that could be evaluated as extreme right is Rıza Nur. He writes that the Battle of Kosovo actually started as a rebellion which was led by the Serbs in the whole Balkans. Sultan Murad’s army was joined by *Sadrizam* (“grand vizier”) Çınarlızade Ali Pasha’s forces and marched towards the army that represented the whole Balkans. It is important to note that this “crusader” “enemy” army consisted of 100.000 soldiers from Serbia, Hungary, Wallachia and Bosnia, “representing the whole Balkans”, positioned itself to best possible location in the Kosovo plain while “ours” had 40.000 soldiers and were in an

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<sup>74</sup> Danişmend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 1). p. 79. “[i]şte bu vaziyet üzerine müttefiklerin daha fazla mukavemet edemeyerek kaçışmaya başladıkları ve bir taraftan bunlar Türklerin kılıcı altında can verirken bir taraftan da müttefik ordular başkumandanı ve Sırbistan kralı Lazar Grebliyanoviç’in maiyyet beyleri ve bin kişilik kıtasıyla beraber esir alındıkları”

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p. 80.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p. 85

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 87.

unfavorable geographical position. However against all the odds Ottoman army “ruined the enemy in a complete way.”<sup>78</sup> While King Lazar was killed, a wounded Serb, Miloš Kobilovič, approached to Sultan by basically telling him the famous lie and killed him. Rıza Nur interestingly concludes “the sultan was buried and mausoleum erected at the site. It is still present and in the hands of the Serbs. C’est la vie!”<sup>79</sup>

This “rebellious Serbs against the Turks” theme continuously appears at almost all phases of Ottoman-Serbian history in the nationalistic historiography. How come such a happy society with the Ottoman rule could be provoked or led to rebellion so easily is a question that should have been addressed by the authors of these books. The answer for this question might be in the 19th century history that witnessed the falling apart of the “Sublime State” (Devlet-i Aliyye) in which Serbs were the first nation to be provoked and rebelled. It is assumed that there is a direct continuity between the Serbian society in the fourteenth century and the nineteenth century. It is a journey from a happy and prosperous society to an ungrateful and rebellious population where Turks became the real victims of the events.

Furthermore, from the narrative of Yılmaz Öztuna interesting points could be found regarding the “First Kosovo Victory”. Unlike Rıza Nur, he indicates the disastrous Pločnik Battle that costed 20.000 martyrs to the Ottomans against a crusader army in 1388 as the main cause for the preparations of a great battle in the Balkans for both sides; one is determined to expel the Turks, the other to establish stability for herself in the region. Allied forces were from Hungary, Poland, Serbia, Kingdom of Bosnia, Wallachia, Croatia, Bohemia, Albania and Bulgaria. In addition, it is stated as any other Turkish author that the crusader army had much more soldiers compared to forces of Murad I. Before the explanation of the battle, Öztuna includes one interesting issue to his history. He says “as the Serbian sources also confess, while the Turkish army moved

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<sup>78</sup> Rıza Nur, & Kiliç, E. (1978). *Türk tarihi* (Vol. 3). pp. 165-166. “düşmanı fena bir perişanlıkla perişan eylemiştir”

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p. 165-166. “Padişah oraya defnolunup üzerine türbe yapıldı. El’an mevcuttur ve Sırpıların elindedir. Dünya bu!”



forward, it did not do the slightest damage [to the civilians].” Although he does not say what exactly the source is, it is significant that the confession of Turks’ righteous attitude comes from the Serbian side which could be thought as a detail to point out who *the enemy* was in this battle.<sup>80</sup>

After eight hours of battle Turks completely destroyed the allied forces and put them to the sword, including the commander Lazar. This, being one of the greatest battles of the middle ages, however, led to martyrdom of Sultan Murad. He was killed by the son-in-law of Lazar, Miloš, with a dagger by stabbing his head. Though there are many versions of the killing of the sultan in 1389, this version is the one that could be embraced by the average reader more excitedly where the protagonist is a Serbian noble to represent the Serbian people to some extent, and the wound opened in sultan’s heart to martyr him. Surely, Miloš was cut into pieces by the Turks.<sup>81</sup>

The last nationalist historian to be mentioned, Zuhuri Danişman, writes about the Battle of Kosovo in detail and even with dialogues that he borrows from the sixteenth century Ottoman historian Neşri. He defines the allied forces with Serbian, Wallachian, Bosnian, Albanian and few Hungarian and Polish soldiers commanded by the Serbian king. A dialogue between Sultan Murad and the shameless Serbian envoy in Danişman’s narrative is an interesting one:

- Envoy: Why you are so late? We have been waiting for you for three months.
- Murad I: You should be replied by the sword but “envoys have to be spared” (“elçiye zeval olmaz”). You will see what will happen in the battlefield...  
After taking a walk among the Ottoman army the envoy continued being impertinent:
- You showed me your army but our king’s army is three times larger than this. Especially the armored cavalry unit of 15.000 could alone destroy your whole army.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 2). p. 297. “Sırp kaynaklarının da itiraf ettiği gibi, Türk ordusu yürüyüşü sırasında en küçük bir tahribat yapmadı.”

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. P. 297.

<sup>82</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 2). pp. 204-205.

This attitude enraged the sultan. He expelled the envoy and gathered his war council in accordance with the Islamic tradition and *Sunna* (deeds of the prophet Muhammad). It is only in Danişman's narrative that Murad I looked anxious. He recites the Qur'an the whole night and commanders consulted the practice of bibliomancy from the Qur'an, all refer to importance of Islamic practices among the Sultan and high commanders and strong belief to fate. It is even told that Murad prayed, asking "provide the army victory and take my life" to God. In contrast to the calm and devoted nature of the Ottoman headquarters, there was confusion and discord among the enemy lines in the morning. The main issue that the commanders discussed was whether or not to attack at night. Since they were sure about the victory they eventually thought that in case of a night attack the Ottoman army could escape them and be saved from total demolition. Therefore they decided to wait until the morning.<sup>83</sup>

Danişman incorporates traditions from various sources. These historical accounts differ from one another on this issue but it is commonly indicated that allied forces were larger in number compared to the Ottoman army. Danişman believes the anxiety of Murad prior to the battle is a strong proof for this situation and he concludes that allied forces should be more than 100.000 and Ottoman army less than 60.000.<sup>84</sup> Besides the similar killing stories of Serbian King Lazar Grebliyanović and Sultan Murad he also importantly adds that, with the Serbian sources' witnessing, Miloš did not kill the sultan out of nationalistic feeling but to clear himself out of a personal issue.<sup>85</sup>

It is already underlined that Yerasimos brought the economical and ideological aspects of the Ottoman expansion in the Balkans. On the other hand, Zuhuri Danişman offers a three-sided explanation. The disciplined Ottoman army is the first reason for rapid Ottoman expansion in the Balkans, he claims. The Janissaries were significant but the most important unit was the *Turkish timarlis* according to Danişman. Secondly "the Ottoman rule and policies were found

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<sup>83</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 2). p. 206. "orduğu muzafer eyle, beni kurban kıl"

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. pp. 211-212.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 226.

very humanistic by the Orthodox Balkan people who had to make a choice between the Hungarian oppression and Turkish justice”. By stating this, Danişman argues that there was a voluntary aspect in conquests. The quotation he borrows from Gibbons to strengthen his argument is “It must not be forgotten that every single nation in the Balkans preferred Ottoman sovereignty over their neighbors’ and the single point that these conflicting states agreed upon was the fact that Ottoman rule was way better than those of Hungarians and Italians.” Finally the anarchic post-Dušan politics in the region and the struggle among the Serbian lords for power proved very useful for Ottomans to advance.<sup>86</sup>

Very similar to what Danişmend wrote, the unexpected move by the new sultan to connect Serbia tightly to Istanbul as a vassal state, instead of crushing her to ground is valid in Öztuna and Danişman as well.<sup>87</sup> This way, all three historians agree that a thankful (“minnettar”) Serbia would be much more useful especially in the inevitable struggle against the Hungarians. It is not mentioned anywhere at this point that Serbian soldiers were used mainly against the Turcoman principalities in Anatolia instead against the Hungarians.

From the Islamist point of view, Ziya Nur Aksun’s depiction of the Kosovo Battle is worth considering. Similar to what Danişman derived from the various accounts, Aksun as well believes that the Ottoman army of 60.000 fought against 100.000 allied enemy forces.<sup>88</sup> As the result, “enemy was utterly destroyed” and the Sultan who asked for victory and martyrdom from God was killed by Miloš. Regarding Miloš, Aksun goes into detail and explains that Miloš, although a folkloric hero in Serbia today and has statues around the country, did not decide to kill the sultan due to his patriotic feelings but because of “his aim to prevent an accusation related to a woman issue.”<sup>89</sup> Finally, on the battle, he writes that Bayezid concluded it in the absence of his

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<sup>86</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 2). p. 228.

<sup>87</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 2). p. 306.; Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 2). p. 250.

<sup>88</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (1994). *Osmanlı tarihi : Osmanlı devleti’nin tahlilli, tenkidli siyasi târihi* (Vol. 1). İstanbul: Ötüken Nesriyat A.S. p. 64.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. p. 64. “karı kavgası sebebi bir ithamı engellemek amaçlıdır”

father and forced the Serbian king to a peace deal to render Serbia a vassal state. Unlike any other historian, Aksun does not mention the killing of Lazar and also writes that he –as the king- made peace with Bayezid the Thunderbolt.<sup>90</sup>

As this war sealed the fate of the Balkan nations, according to Aksun, the battle field is signified by being the “Place of Martyrdom of the Sultan” (Meşhed-i Hüdavendigâr) which is the “symbol of our sovereignty in the Balkans”.<sup>91</sup> As Murad I gave freedom (“serbestlik”) to all Balkan Christians, the Ottoman rule was *preferred* to any other rule by the Balkan nations. Interestingly, Ziya Nur Aksun connects history with the present day as he states that “at present, in face of the political practices which do not acknowledge freedom of conscience, human rights and justice, [the tomb of Sultan Murad] constitutes a banner of these ideals.”<sup>92</sup> On this narrative two issues are worth underlining. One is his frequent usage of “the Balkan nations (Balkan kavimleri)”, where the term nation is used. What is known today as “imagined communities” is projected to the medieval past. Also, his obvious reference to Serbia under the government of Slobodan Milošević is striking, when he uses the phrase “political practices which do not acknowledge freedom of conscience, human rights and justice.”

### 2.2.2. Struggle in Anatolia: 1390

Once the Balkans was safer than ever for the Ottomans in the aftermath of the Battle of Kosovo, they turned their attention to Anatolia. From the general outline of the many histories that were written in the Turkish Republic, it could be claimed that Bayezid’s intentions were clear to complete a political unity in Anatolia by bringing the principalities under Ottoman control. In order to achieve this goal he made several attempts towards the eastern frontier.

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<sup>90</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (2006). *İslâm tarihi* (Vol. 3). İstanbul: Ötüken Nesriyat. p. 23.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p. 21. “Halen Balkanlar’da vicdan hürriyeti, insan hakları ve adalet tanımayan siyasi tatbikata karşı (that is to say Serbs) bu mefhumların (these ideals) bayrağıdır”

Finkel and Vatin agree on the fact that the Ottoman military campaigns on the Turcoman principalities during the Bayezid's reign were supported significantly by his vassals.<sup>93</sup> That is to say, while Kadı Burhaneddin, Saruhanoğlu, Germiyanoğlu, Menteşeoğlu and Hamidoğlu principalities gathered around Karamanoğulları, Bayezid the Thunderbolt brought military support from Stephen and Lazarević of Serbia and Manuel II Palaiologos of Byzantine Empire.

Surely, the usage of Christian soldiers against the Turcoman and Muslim Anatolian principalities is a controversial topic in the early Ottoman history. Among the republican period historians that were surveyed three basic inclinations could be observed.

Firstly, Zuhuri Danişman and İsmail Hami Danişmend writes about the Serbian soldiers in some detail only enough to enable the reader to have an idea regarding their existence during the Anatolian campaign of Bayezid I in 1390.<sup>94</sup> However, there are interesting issues that could be highlighted in these two narratives. Danişman, for instance, stresses the fact that during the occupation of Karaman in 1397 only Turkish soldiers were used on both parties since "... this struggle was between two rulers who made claims over the legacy of the Seljukids and aimed at establishing hegemony over Anatolia."<sup>95</sup> Also Danişmend asserts that Bayezid the Thunderbolt undertook these campaigns because he wanted to establish "national and political union of the fatherland."<sup>96</sup>

Secondly, Öztuna mentions about the presence of Serbian and Byzantine soldiers so slightly that only a careful and questioning reader could realize its real essence. Öztuna suffices to say that while Ottoman army was advancing towards

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<sup>93</sup> Finkel, C. (2005). *Osman's dream: the story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923*. London: John Murray, p. 23 and Vatin, N. in Mantran, R. (1999). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi*. (S. Tanilli, Trans.) (2nd ed., Vol. 1). Istanbul: Adam Yayinlari. p. 56.

<sup>94</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 3). Istanbul: Zuhuri Danişman Yayınevi. pp. 10-15.; Danişmend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 1). Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi. pp. 88-92.

<sup>95</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 24.

<sup>96</sup> Danişmend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 1). p. 115. "ana vatanın milli ve siyasi birliğini".

the western Anatolia there were few Serbian soldiers.<sup>97</sup> He also argues that Kadi Burhaneddin was a cruel man, the Karamanids were meant to be deprived from Seljuk legacy due to their shallow policies and the people of central Anatolia strongly desired Ottoman rule.<sup>98</sup> This approach is a rather apologetic and legitimizing one. It should not be a coincidence that legitimization of war against the Muslim principalities and ignoring the fact of the usage of the Christian soldiers came altogether in the same chapter in Öztuna's narrative.

Thirdly, and most problematically, Ziya Nur Aksun completely denies the existence of the usage of Christian soldiers in Anatolia. He writes that cities like Akşehir, Niğde and Akhisar opened their gates to Ottoman army due to the just rule of the Ottomans by ignoring completely about the Serbian and Byzantine vassals' inclusion to campaign completely.<sup>99</sup>

### 2.2.3. The Battle of Ankara

The Battle of Ankara against Tamerlane that took place in 1402 turned out to be a disastrous one for the Ottomans. Surely among many other aspects that could be discussed, the focus here will be on the Serbs and their situation during the battle. Furthermore, one significant Serbian character in this chapter of the Ottoman history as being wife to Bayezid I is Olivera Despina. However, the things written regarding the personalities of Olivera and Bayezid I will be dealt with in the chapter III.

In terms of the overall stance of the popular Turkish historians that wrote about the Battle of Ankara, a three-fold grouping could be made. According to the first group, there were Serbian soldiers in the Ottoman army during the battle; however they were not useful as they deserted the battlefield, leaving Ottomans in the dire situation. Second group argues that, there were surely Serbian soldiers

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<sup>97</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 2). İstanbul: Ötüken Nesriyat. p. 306.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p. 314.

<sup>99</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (2006). *İslâm tarihi* (Vol. 3). pp. 23-25.

in the army and what they have done during and after the battle were of great importance. It has to be also added that this theme of usefulness is valid for the narratives of modern historians, such as; Caroline Finkel<sup>100</sup> and Nicolas Vatin<sup>101</sup>. The third stance, finally, is the exclusion of the Serbs as an actor in the Battle of Ankara completely.

İsmail Hami Danişmend writes that the defeat in the Çubuk plain near Ankara was a great national disaster. Danişman explains that Serbian King Stefan's forces were part of the Ottoman army which made up to 100.000 soldiers against an enemy of 300.000. Serbs, however, escaped once they understood that no chances of survival left for the Ottoman army.<sup>102</sup> Rıza Nur, in this regard, shortly writes that 8000 Serbian soldiers as well as King Stefan were present in the Ottoman army of 100.000 soldiers. While he uses the terms Ottoman army and Turkish army interchangeably in this context, it is unclear what Serbian soldiers did during and after the war.<sup>103</sup> Öztuna, similarly, states that between ten and twenty thousand Serbian soldiers were located in the left wing of the Ottoman army and were controlled by the brother-in-law of Bayezid I. He further argues that when the things started to get bad for the Ottomans and some losses occurred from the Serbian forces, Serbian army retreated without any consideration about the rest of the army.<sup>104</sup> There is an interesting point here regarding the slight shift in stance of Öztuna over time. While in his *Büyük Türkiye Tarihi* ("Great History of Turkey") that was printed in late 1970's there is a negativity ascribed to the Serbian force in the Ottoman army in the Battle of Ankara, his earlier work on the issue, a monograph that was printed in 1946, claims otherwise. Öztuna argues that the 10-20 thousand soldiers that were commanded by Serbian King Petro Stefan Lazarević constituted a vigorous

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<sup>100</sup> Finkel, C. (2005). *Osman's dream: the story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923*. p. 28.

<sup>101</sup> Vatin, N. in Mantran, R. (1999). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi*. (S. Tanilli, Trans.) (2nd ed., Vol. 1). Istanbul: Adam Yayınları. p. 66.

<sup>102</sup> Danişmend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 1). pp. 130-132.

<sup>103</sup> Rıza Nur, & Kiliç, E. (1978). *Türk tarihi* (Vol. 3). Istanbul: Toker Yayınları. p. 170.

<sup>104</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 2). Istanbul: Ötügen Nesriyat. p. 345.

armoured force in the Ottoman forces and were extremely helpful.<sup>105</sup> Adding that Öztuna uses much more references and footnotes in his earlier work, it seems to be more sensitive about historical methodology and a possible reason for his shift in the attitude regarding the Serbian forces, without any indication of source, could be explained with a more nationalist approach to the history.

Secondly, Zuhuri Danişman is the author that writes openly about the existence and the good work done by the Serbian soldiers in the Battle of Ankara. According to Danişman, there were ten or twenty thousand Serbian soldiers in the Ottoman army that consisted totally of thirty or sixty thousand soldiers, which increases the percentage to around %30 compared to %10 that was given by the authors in the first group.<sup>106</sup> From the general outlook of Danişman's narrative, it is understood that Serbs in the Ottoman army both consisted a significant portion and fought well. Likewise the general situation, regarding the Serbs in the Ottoman Empire is quite positive in Danişman's narrative and he does not blame Olivera for spoiling Bayezid I and leading to misadministration of the empire and controlling the army in the battlefield.<sup>107</sup> As mentioned, while Finkel agrees with this approach, Vatin goes one step further and ascribes a very critical role to the Serbs. Regarding the Battle of Ankara, he states "Only Serbian forces were standing. Since Bayezid I declined to retreat while he was protected with a unit of Janissaries, Stefan Lazarević, desperately, had to pull back and tried to provide the safety of prince Suleyman". According to Vatin this was an attitude to keep the state standing and alive in the midst of a terrible defeat.<sup>108</sup>

Finally, the narrative of Ziya Nur Aksun is the one that ignores the Serbian existence in the Ottoman army. Both in *Osmanlı Tarihi*<sup>109</sup> and *İslam Tarihi*<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1946). *1402 Ankara Muharebesi : Bayazıt ile Timur'un Ölümü ve Fetret Devri*, Kenan Matbaası, İstanbul. p. 22-23.

<sup>106</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 86.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p. 86-118.

<sup>108</sup> Vatin, N. in Mantran, R. (1999). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi*. (S. Tanilli, Trans.) (2nd ed., Vol. 1). İstanbul: Adam Yayınları. p. 66.

<sup>109</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (1994). *Osmanlı tarihi : Osmanlı devleti'nin tahlilli, tenkidli siyasi târihi* (Vol. 1). İstanbul: Ötüken Nesriyat A.S.



books there is neither a mention regarding the Serbs in the Ottoman army during the Battle of Ankara nor any references to relationship of Bayezid I with Stefan Lazarević.

To sum up, it appears that it is highly unlikely to deduce reliable information regarding one of the most significant times that Serbs were active in the Ottoman history in a very explicit manner. Their existence either completely ignored or downplayed by the popular historians. It is also interesting to observe that while the historians that underlined the Serbian escape from the battlefield, such as; Yılmaz Öztuna and İsmail Hami Danişmend, on one hand writes along the national terms and do not incorporate the non-Turkic or non-Muslim elements of the Empire to the Ottoman society and administrative elite properly, on the other hand they could expect a complete loyalty, more than the Turkish soldiers offer, to the sultan, hence describing the Serbian retreat in the Battle of Ankara as a betrayal.

### **2.3. Until Serbia Becomes History**

#### **2.3.1. The Last Phase of the Ottoman Interregnum: 1412-13**

The following years of the disastrous Ankara Battle were defined by the struggles for the throne among the princes Mehmed, Süleyman and Musa in the Ottoman realms. As Finkel argues, especially in the final phase of these struggles, the Serbian despot Stephen Lazarević and his soldiers were very influential in determining the outcome.<sup>111</sup> During the decisive battle in 1413 between Mehmed and Musa, just like Serbian army, Byzantine Emperor Manuel and Dulkadiroğlu forces too fought alongside Mehmed of whom they thought as the weaker one.<sup>112</sup> Similar to what Orhan once did, by supporting the weaker candidate to throne, now it is their turn to balance the power struggle not to let the strong to become even stronger.

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<sup>110</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (2006). *İslâm tarihi* (Vol. 3)

<sup>111</sup> Finkel, C. (2005). *Osman's dream: the story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923*. p. 32.

<sup>112</sup> Inalcik, H. (2007). *Osmanli Imparatorlugu klasik çag (1300-1600)*. (R. Sezer, Trans.). p. 24.

Among the researched histories of the Turkish historians, it is possible to find traces of the aid provided by Byzantines and Serbs only in two: İsmail Hami Danişmend's *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi* and Zuhuri Danişman's *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu Tarihi*. Danişmend mentions both the Serbian support in 1410 to Musa Çelebi for the capture of Edirne and their change-of-sides in 1413 to help Mehmed to defeat Musa.<sup>113</sup>

Danişman provides a little more detail than Danişmend. In 1410 Stefan Lazarević's forces fought first against Süleyman and then for Süleyman against Musa. Although Musa lost the battle by the Eyüp walls, he took revenge by catching and killing disloyal Vuk Lazarević, the despot's brother. In Danişman's narrative it was shown very clearly that the Serbian soldiers' help was decisive and significant. He even mentions that during the battle in 1413, left wing of Mehmed's army consisted completely of Serbs.<sup>114</sup> Except for these two historians, this important detail to end the Ottoman interregnum does not find itself a place in the narratives.

### **2.3.2. The Sheik Bedreddin Rebellion - 1416**

The early years of the Mehmed I were still turbulent times for the Ottoman lands and understandably many authors refer him as the second founder of the empire. One very significant issue of Mehmed's reign surely was Şeyh Bedreddin Rebellion. Although all of the historians mention the educational background of the Şeyh, his expanding influence among the unhappy peasants, the phases of the rebellion and somewhat socialist nature of Şeyh Bedrettin's thoughts (surely the famous "to share everything except for wives" ["*yarın yanağından gayrı*"] verse) there is not much information to be deduced regarding the situation in the Balkans and the peasants of the region.

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<sup>113</sup> Danişmend, İ. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 1). p. 166.

<sup>114</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 169-171.

However, there is one writer/poet that provides limited socio-economic history in his beautifully written piece. Nazım Hikmet mentions about the situation in the Rumelia provinces of the Ottoman Empire and this part of the Rumelia region, where followers of Bedreddin gathered, is called Deliorman and also known as “ağaç denizi” (the sea of trees). Today the place is between the cities of Razgrad and Kubrat, Bulgaria.

Nazım Hikmet claims that peasantry supported Bedreddin’s movement and he asserts that remnants of its effects are still visible in the 1910’s, right before the Balkan Wars. This influence could be seen in the region as the villagers of Rumelia are the most stubborn and tax evading people in the world.<sup>115</sup> Nazım’s historical poem implies a former presence of an oppressive tax-collecting notable class. Therefore, in contrast to all other right-wing authors, Nazım’s poetic voice rejects the notion of an all-happy Balkan people under Ottoman administration.

However, Vatin considers Nazım Hikmet’s romantic poetry as ahistorical and regards his view on the past as belonging to the field of the history of literature of the early Republican era. He does not believe that Şeyh Bedreddin’s ideas were mainly about communism. He argues that Bedreddin’s ideas were rather reproduced and instrumentalised by the authors of the republican era. Because, he thinks, there is so little data about Bedreddin’s political ideas.<sup>116</sup>

### 2.3.3. The Reign of Murad II

After the Battle of Ankara the established vassaldom suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire over Stefan Lazarević was changed naturally since vassaldom is a phenomenon that is defined within certain power relations. As was seen during the Ottoman interregnum, the idea of loyalty to the Sultan was gone and loyalty to self-interests principle gained validity for Serbia. It might even be claimed

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<sup>115</sup> Nazım Hikmet. (1968). *Simavne kadısı oğlu Şeyh Bedreddin destanı*. İstanbul: Dost Yayınları, p. 57.

<sup>116</sup> Vatin, N. in Mantran, R. (1999). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi*. (S. Tanilli, Trans.) (2nd ed., Vol. 1). p. 78.

that during the interregnum Byzantine Empire and especially Serbia considered Ottoman state only as first among the equals. This was the first significant change in the nature of the relations between Ottomans and Serbs. The second change and divergence occurred following the death of Stefan Lazarević in 1427, which completed the rupture from the established relations of Bayezid's time.

Finkel summarizes the events during the rule of Murad II as follows: "The uncertain allegiance of Serbia provoked Ottoman attacks in the mid-1430s and the vassaldom of Serbia to the Ottomans rather than to Hungary was formalized through the Serbian despot George Brankovic's payment of tribute and the marriage of his daughter Mara to Murad."<sup>117</sup> Surely the events of 1427 and 1448 attracted much attention among the Turkish historians. Looking into the details and comments that they provided, the nature of the relations and Serbia's situation in the first second quarter of the fifteenth century will be seen.

Öztuna states what he would conclude in the end, already in the beginning, he, first analyses and judges, and then gives the relevant historical information. During the reign of Murad II, Serbia accepted to pay a yearly tribute and send soldiers on request but "they were not sincere about their commitment to Turkey. "They had succumbed to Turkish might but were still dreaming of independence" ("Türk kuvveti karşısında baş eğmişlerdi ve istiklal hülyasında idiler."). Following their trials to form a secret alliance with the Hungarians in 1433, Vizier Sarıca Pasha went to Semendire to call account from the despot. "The despot, who was extremely frightened, gave his oath of loyalty to the Turkish Khagan. He also promised to establish no relationship with Hungary. His daughter Mara, who was known for her beauty and from her mother's side related to the Komnenos dynasty of Trabzon, was engaged to Murad II."<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Finkel, C. (2005). *Osman's dream: the story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923*. p. 42.

<sup>118</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 2). p. 397. "Fevkalade ürken Despot, Türk Hakanı'na sadakat yemini etti. Macaristan'la hiçbir münasebette bulunmayacağına söz verdi. Kızı, güzelliğiyle meşhur ve ana tarafından Trabzon Commenusları'na mensup bulunan Mara, Murad II'ye nişanlandı."

Zuhuri Danişman, too, thinks in the same lines with Öztuna in this regard. In this insincere friendship, Mara becomes the insurance policy that Branković gives away to save Serbia. Although he could once promised but did not send his daughter due to her young age, once the news of strengthened walls of Semendire reached Adrianople he had no choice but to let her be taken by one of Murad's commander's harem. This could barely save Branković from the sultan's rage.<sup>119</sup> Zuhuri Danişman further explains that relations between Murad and Branković did not go well afterwards and Semendire was taken after three months of siege in August 1439.

#### **2.3.4. Annexation of Serbia: 1454-59**

The process of annexation of Serbia begins with the rule of Mehmed II, whom campaigns were commenced to remove Hungarian presence and influence in Serbia (1454-55). In 1456 Belgrade was besieged. Finally, in 1459, the capital city of Smederevo was conquered and Serbia as a political entity became terminated. Although the issue of annexation has been dealt mainly within the context of Ottoman – Hungarian struggle for supremacy in the region according to the Turkish popular historiography, right before the annexation the problem of succession in Serbian lands among various claimants taken up as the main catalyst that led to final Ottoman move.

The theme of 'Ottoman tolerance' especially on the basis of religious freedom compared to Hungarian oppression has to be underlined once more in the context of these campaigns and annexation of Serbia, as historians, such as; İsmail Hami Danişmend and Ziya Nur Aksun, give the example of Mehmed II as a just and tolerant ruler that won the hearts of the Serbs. For instance, Danişmend highlights the permission of Mehmed II for the construction of an Orthodox church next to each mosque in the region.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 3). pp. 279-281.

<sup>120</sup> Danismend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 1). p. 275.

Following the death of the Serbian King Brankovic in 1456<sup>121</sup>, his son Lazar succeeded. However; he died too after ruling only for two months and these sudden deaths of two rulers caused a crisis of succession in Serbia.<sup>122</sup> Claimants to rule in Serbia who were mentioned in Danişmend's narrative are two sons of Brankovic that were still alive (brothers of Lazar); their sister princess Mara who was married to Murad II and therefore was called 'Tzaritza' ("Çariçe Mara"), Lazar's widowed wife Eleni and Lazar's son-in-law the Bosnian King. However, says Danişmend, "Mehmed the Conqueror is the strongest claimant" as the Ottomans had established family ties with Serbian dynasty twice by marriage.<sup>123</sup> The claim of Mehmed II over his step-mother Mara and support of some Serbian nobles to him as a tolerant ruler against the oppressive Catholic influence on Serbia put weight to Ottoman claims in Serbia.<sup>124</sup> Finkel, in this regard, concurs with the idea of the Serbian nobles' favoring the Ottoman rule in contrast to Hungarians.<sup>125</sup>

Öztuna, in this regard, argues, without touching to the issue of various claimants, that the death of Brankovic and Hungarian oppression paved the way for the annexation of Serbia whose rulers actually have been tricking the Ottomans by collaborating with the Hungarians for years.<sup>126</sup> Regarding the annexation, Öztuna writes that "The Conqueror's ending of Serbia in 1459 and connecting the country, as a simple *vilayet* (province) [...], to *Rumeli Beylerbeyliği* ("Governorship of Rumelia") not only annihilated the idea of Serbia for ages, but also indicated the end for Bosnia."<sup>127</sup> This approach could be regarded as the final phase of a discourse that was started as somehow equal at the time of Orhan and continued as the superior for more than a hundred years. Kingdom of Serbia became a simple 'vilayet' –not even an 'eyalet'- and its name was erased from the face of the earth for ages.

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<sup>121</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 12.

<sup>122</sup> Danismend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 1). p.280.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. p.280.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. pp.280-287.

<sup>125</sup> Finkel, C. (2005). *Osman's dream : the story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923*. p. 59.

<sup>126</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 3). pp. 9-12.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. p. 24.

Furthermore, it is understood by now that Ziya Nur Aksun could omit the issues regarding the Serbs in his narrative. This case is true for the campaigns of Mehmed II to Serbia and her annexation as well. In his *İslam Tarihi* (“The History of Islam”) there is no single reference to Serbia, her annexation and devshirme pashas of Serbian origin in the chapter that he dedicated to Mehmed II.<sup>128</sup> Aksun writes very limitedly regarding the annexation of Serbia in his *Osmanlı Tarihi* (“The Ottoman History”). According to Aksun, Serbian people were saved from the yoke of the Catholics and anarchy and “tasted an unprecedented just rule” with the annexation.<sup>129</sup>

Another issue, i.e. the devshirme pashas of Serbian origin, has been related in a more detailed way by popular historiography, especially while discussing the reign of Mehmed II. This topic will be dealt in Chapter III.

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<sup>128</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (2006). *İslâm tarihi* (Vol. 3). pp. 37-42.

<sup>129</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (1994). *Osmanlı tarihi : Osmanlı devleti'nin tahlilli, tenkidli siyasi târihi* (Vol. 1). pp. 145-147.

### CHAPTER 3

#### REEMERGENCE OF SERBIA

Although economic inefficiency and misrule was an empire-wide phenomenon in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the Balkans populations of the empire felt the decline of the military and land regime most. In addition to excessive taxation in order to supply a wartime economy, misuses and acts of oppression by the Janissaries caused a common distrust and complaint in the region. This explanation surely depicts a very economical aspect of the rebellions. In addition to the economical discontent the ideas that were spread by the French Revolution of 1789 made a great impact on the populations of the empires throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Particularly regarding the Serbian case, today many historians believe that it very doubtful that there was a commonly shared nationalistic feeling and willingness to fight in the name of the Serbian nation when the uprising of 1804 broke out in Belgrade and it was a peasant rebellion.<sup>130</sup> Although this idea implies that there was neither a well defined Serbian territory nor a consciousness of nationality in the modern sense, people at least exactly knew that they were different and distinct from the ruling elite of the empire and some of the neighboring populations through the differences in language and belief. Main resource of this consciousness occurred due to the existence of the Serbian Orthodox Church that lived until 1766. The church had been a cohesive factor for the Serbian community where societal life was rooted. The fact that services and education in the church was given in Old Church Slavonic and the church was distinct from Greek Orthodox Church, helped a lot for the preservation of a Serbian identity separate from both Ottomans and Greeks. Also the Ottoman taxation methods contributed to the continuation of a collective Serbian community. In this system not individuals (households) but villages were

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<sup>130</sup> Mazower, M. (2002). *The Balkans : from the end of Byzantium to the present day*. London: Phoenix, p. 89.; Adanır, F. in 2008'den 1908'e Bakmak, Dursun, M., Vardagli, T., Toplumsal Arastirma ve Egitim Merkezi, & Düne Bakarak Bugünü Anlamak. (2009). Düne bakarak bugünü anlamak : 2008'den 1908'e bakmak. Istanbul: Tarem Yayinlari, pp. 107-112.; also as Fikret Adanır cited in Aslantas, S. (2007). 19. yüzyilin safaginda Balkanlar : Osmanlida Sırp isyanlari. Istanbul: Kitap yayınevi. p. 11.; Adanır, F. (2006). Fransız İhtilali, Sırp Ayaklanması ve Osmanlı Devleti. *Toplumsal Tarih*, 147. p. 35.



responsible as a whole for a large amount which kept villages intact and village life preserved. It is obvious that such system required a village leadership for the collection of the taxes. Therefore; Serbs had their headmen, the *knezes*, and assemblies, the *skupštinas*, who eventually became the leaders of the Serbian community.<sup>131</sup>

Further developments within and around the Serbian community in the course of the eighteenth century created the basis for the uprising of 1804 and translated the already differentiated societal structure into an ethnically aware and active one. For instance, the recapture of Hungary by the Habsburgs where a considerable amount of Serbian population lived increased the interactions through the border. While modern ideas, such as secularism, constitutionalism, rationalism and romanticism, were flowing to the south of the Danube, Serbs could visit a place where Christians were not second-class citizens. However; this was not the only influence to shape Serbian identity and politics. Also the religious difference between Catholic Habsburgs and Orthodox Serbs intensified the awareness of the separate Serbian identity once more. In other words “If the Ottoman system taught Serbs that they were Christian, the Austrians taught them that they were Slavic and Orthodox”<sup>132</sup>

The developments within the Serbian domains, too, contributed for the progression of the Serbian identity and a better societal organization. Two significant scholars in this regard have to be mentioned. One is Dositej Obradovic (1739-1811) who wrote a Serbian dictionary and systematized the grammar. The other is Vuk Karadzic (1787-1864) who collected and published Serbian epic poetry. Both contributed much for the Serbian realization and awareness of linguistics and cultural heritage which are indispensable from the idea of nation. The learning for political and military establishment from Habsburgs and Russia was another factor for Serbs to first revolt and take further

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<sup>131</sup> Jelavich, C. (1954). Some Aspects of Serbian Religious Development in the Eighteenth Century. *Church History*, 23(2), pp. 144–152.; Stavrianos, L. S. (1957). Antecedents to the Balkan Revolutions of the Nineteenth Century. *The Journal of Modern History*, 29(4), 335–348, p. 336.

<sup>132</sup> Sowards, S. W. (2008, November 4). Twenty-Five Lectures On Modern Balkan History : The Balkans In The Age Of Nationalism. Retrieved from <http://staff.lib.msu.edu/sowards/balkan/>

steps for state building later on.<sup>133</sup> In addition, the closure of the Patriarchate of Peć in 1776, which subordinated the Serbian Orthodox Church to patriarchate of Istanbul, had an important influence for the establishment of a Serbian identity. Serbs then became more open to influence from the Habsburg Empire who provided them religious and political privileges with the establishment of Serbian Orthodox metropolinate in Karlovci, near Novi Sad. This situation more and more enabled the flux of ideas and intellectual influence. That is to say, the ideals of the Enlightenment along with liberalism and romanticism first flourished among the Serbs that lived in Habsburg lands and then transferred or brought to the south of the Danube in order to be implemented as a political project.<sup>134</sup>

Pavlowitch agrees that, although there was an active social and political environment in the south and north of the Danube for the development of the Serbian identity, it was still a “multi-faceted, multi-centered, multi-layered” one until the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>135</sup> It is only with the nineteenth century that the interaction between the populations in the Habsburg lands and those in the Ottoman Empire resulted in concrete action. Yet this does not mean that the events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Serbia were unilateral and developing under the influence of one agreed Serbian identity and one undisputed political program. Rather it could be argued that accumulation of ideas and political activism finally started to give tangible results, such as uprisings and armed opposition to Sultan’s authority.<sup>136</sup>

It was all clear by the nineteenth century that Ottoman central authority was no more able to reach to provinces regularly. Serbia or the Pashalik of Belgrade was not an exception in this sense. Janissaries in Belgrade, the most significant Ottoman force in the city, were both against the reformist Selim III and in pursuit of their own interests. This meant that without any authority they felt

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<sup>133</sup> Jelavich, C. (1954). Some Aspects of Serbian Religious Development in the Eighteenth Century. *Church History*, 23(2), p. 149.

<sup>134</sup> Pavlowitch, S. K. (2001). *Serbia : the history behind the name*. London: Hurst & Co. p. 22.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* p. 25.

<sup>136</sup> Aslantas, S. (2007). *19. yüzyilin safaginda Balkanlar : Osmanlida Sirp isyanlari*. p. 15.

from the center they could act freely to increase their wealth and power, terrorizing the city. By 1802 the city was dominated with the control of four Janissaries, or the *dahis*. Their rule in Serbia was characterized by disorder where robbery and murder became daily phenomena. Fearing that Sultan's help and previous atrocities that they committed were to cause a rebellion, Janissaries and their men killed dozens of Serbian notables and priests in February 1804. This, however; only led remaining leaders and notables to organize a revolt.<sup>137</sup>

Although the factors put forward by Pavlowitch, Cox, Paxton and Sowards are more related to the own dynamics of the Serbian society, the Balkans historiography of the Turkish Republic, in general observes that direct intervention by the Great Powers was the determining factor in the process that led to independence of these states. Among other factors, this important aspect is underlined in Sina Akşin's formulation where he indicates common factors that led to nationalistic movements among the Balkan states.<sup>138</sup> Firstly, all movements have a literary, philological and historical, meaning written background. For instance, it was thanks to Vuk Karadzic's efforts that a developed Serbian language came into being for the identification of the nation. Second factor is the rise of a bourgeoisie class, following to economic development. However, Akşin, as well as Adanır, believe that this factor is not fully valid for Serbia as it was for Bulgaria and they doubt the existence of a Serbian bourgeoisie prior to and during the Serbian Revolution.<sup>139</sup> Also, the example of Montenegro without a full-fledged bourgeoisie class shows that the independence could be achieved with the help of the other dominant factors. Thirdly, Ottoman misgovernment that led to a tyrant and oppressive local feudalism. Akşin believes that neither ayans nor sultans were able to check the local discontent caused by this phenomenon in time and they swiftly became

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<sup>137</sup> Aslantas, S. (2007). *19. yüzyilin safaginda Balkanlar : Osmanlida Sirp isyanlari*. pp. 66-86.

<sup>138</sup> Aksin, S. (2000). *Essays in Ottoman-Turkish political history*. Istanbul: Isis Press. p. 219-224. Bu hususta Zürcher de çok benzer bir mantık yürütmektedir. Zürcher, E. J. (2000). *Modernlesen Türkiye'nin tarihi = Turkey, a modern history*. (Y. S. Gönen, Trans.). Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları. p.85.

<sup>139</sup> Adanır, F. in 2008'den 1908'e Bakmak, Dursun, M., Vardagli, T., Toplumsal Arastirma ve Egitim Merkezi, & Düne Bakarak Bugünü Anlamak. (2009). *Düne bakarak bugünü anlamak : 2008'den 1908'e bakmak*. Istanbul: Tarem Yayınları, pp. 107-112.; Aksin, S. (2000). *Essays in Ottoman-Turkish political history*. p.221.

international issues as seen in the Serbian and Greek revolts. Finally, the role of external agents was named, as the main reason for speedy developments in the Balkan lands of the empire. These were the spreading ideas of French Revolution, encouragement for the locals to rebel, schools, diplomatic missions and most importantly attacks and invasions of the Great Powers that were made in the Ottoman lands.<sup>140</sup>

Russia was the champion of these interventions in favor of the Orthodox Christians of the Empire in the course of the 19th century as she supported Serbia by sending army, doctors, volunteers and officers when she declared war on the Ottoman Empire in 1876 and before. French and British public opinions were very influential by putting pressure on their government, especially during the Greek Revolution. Russia not only encouraged and supported nationalistic movements but also showed Balkan Christians how weak the Empire was by the destructive wars she fought.<sup>141</sup> In the end it was Russo-Ottoman wars of 1806-12 and 1828-29 that resulted in treaties of Bucharest and Edirne to provide autonomy for Serbia and the war of 1877-78 that bestowed full independence to Serbia.

Furthermore; Sina Akşin criticizes some Turkish authors who underlined the influence of French Revolution a lot but did not like to criticize the Empire's own policies, misrule and poorly fought wars in the region. This is significant, because although he claims that the interventions by the Great Powers, especially Russia, were the most influential factor in the rise of the nationalisms, this would be less viable without the Ottoman decline and misrule. Therefore the blame should not be put solely on French and Russians, he implies, as many popular Turkish historians have done so far.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Aksin, S. (2000). *Essays in Ottoman-Turkish political history*. p. 219-224.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. p. 119-121. Sina Akşin distinctively calls the incident "Greek Revolution" with a leftist point of view, unlike the rightist authors' usage of "Revolt".

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. p. 119-121.

### 3.1. First uprisings: 1804-16

The issue of separatist movement in the 19th century Ottoman history is a very multi-faceted one. Therefore; looking into narratives of historians from different understandings for this part of the history could be very useful for a discussion of historiography. As mentioned, there are several factors and themes that are vital in defining the early 19th century history of the Ottoman Empire, such as; the French Revolution, Ottoman misadministration, local notables, declines army and land regime, interventions of the Great Powers and own dynamics of the *millet*s.

In terms of the French Revolution's influence on the Ottoman Empire, Serbs were one step ahead of the other Christian millets as they were the first society to be influenced by the ideas of the French Revolution through the trade relations in a mercantilist environment, literate traders and their educated family members and fellows living in the Austrian realms that were once Ottoman. With several other factors, Serbs became rebellious against the Ottoman rule. However; Zürcher believes that the reason of the very first uprising (1804) was not national in character, but only against the misrule.<sup>143</sup> He also underlines that, in time, the demands and nature of the unrest changed and acquired the character of independence movement.

In the Turkish Republican era historiography, this issue was approached by many authors in different ways but before going into the historians' approach, it has to be said that the discourse, selection of words and formulation of the event will be dealt in this chapter and characters that led the Serbian independence movement, such as Kara George and Obrenovic family, will be mainly discussed in the Chapter III.

To start with a leftist historian, Yerasimos, as it was previously observed too, has a more thematically and theoretical approach. According to Yerasimos, there was already a corrupted state structure, a misadministration and rise of

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<sup>143</sup> Zürcher, E. J. (2000). *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin tarihi = Turkey, a modern history*. (Y. S. Gönen, Trans.). p. 47.

bourgeoisie caused by the emergence of the *çiftlik*s, ayans and Christian merchants, in the Balkan lands of the Ottoman Empire. This situation actually implies heavy burden on peasantry's shoulder and prerequisites of a revolution. However, since this expected revolution could not be achieved by the Balkan populations as a whole, the local bourgeoisie class that was influenced by the national ideals set up for their own revolutions. "First to act were the Serbs who had a national nucleus and consisted a majority in a certain area" says Yerasimos.<sup>144</sup> In this view of the events of the early 19th century the foreign intervention is not a defining factor, rather socio-economical determinants seems to be far more relevant.

Sina Akşin, too, argues that the exploitation and injustice that the Serbian society experienced in the hands of the unruly Janissaries is the main reason for the rebellion of 1804. On the other hand, he emphasizes that, this does not mean that the influence of the French Revolution, indoctrination of the Great Powers and a national character was not there in Serbia.<sup>145</sup> In Akşin's argumentation it is unclear how these national ideas infiltrated into the Serbian society but he definitely believes that Serbs rebelled with a hidden national idea. A little different from what Yerasimos thought, Akşin credits nationalistic ideas along the oppression and injustice that Serbian society have been going through.

Looking at İsmail Hami Danişmend's 19th century narrative, it is not really possible to claim that it differs significantly from the fourteenth and the fifteenth century accounts as he starts with the "Serbian Rebellion" issue by implying that the reason for Janissaries to act violently was the guardian of Belgrade Hacı Mustafa Pasha's collaboration with the Serbs to fight against them. It seems that the responsibility of the events belonged to the pasha who allied with the enemy, who eventually was killed by the Janissaries. He adds that Serbian rebellion was done with a national consciousness right from the beginning. It is also understood that Kara George, a pig trader, first was a hajdut in the service of the Austria, turned his back to his Austrian masters after he secured help from Slav

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<sup>144</sup> Yerasimos, S. (2001). *Azgelismislik sürecinde Türkiye: 1. Bizans'tan Tanzimat'a*. (B. Kuzucu, Trans.). p. 543.

<sup>145</sup> Aksin, S. (Ed.). (2005). *Türkiye tarihi*. p. 90; 102.

Russia. Russians, from this point on became very influential in the Serbian cause as they provoked Serbs and Montenegrins once the unruly Janissaries were eliminated.<sup>146</sup> From the general outlook of the events in Danişmend's history, it might be understood that Janissaries were stabbed from behind by the pasha, who supposed to act in accordance with the janissary wishes. Furthermore, the reason for things to get out of hand is the elimination of the Janissaries which left the Ottomans weak in Belgrade. From this point on, Serbs who got rid of the Janissaries and received help from the Russians acted freely, even arrogantly vis-a-vis the Sublime Porte. Due to the danger of war with Russia, the Sublime Porte decided to reach an agreement with the Serbs. However, this unwritten and unapproved agreement was immediately broken by Kara George and Serbs could get in the Belgrade fortress thanks to betrayer gatekeeper Aziz Bey. Kara George, who felt powerful with these developments killed many Muslims in Belgrade and decided to fight until full independence. Without aforementioned socio-economical problems and any oppression by the Janissaries, Danişmend argues that Serbs felt free to act disloyally, did not hesitate to break the agreements and betrayed in every occasion, which seems very one sided.

Another historian that is regarded as extreme nationalist, Rıza Nur, writes literally nothing about the Serbian issue in the section dedicated to Selim III.<sup>147</sup> Very interestingly, in his book he uses the word "Serb" more frequently and directly than Danişmend, however; they are mostly used in the earlier sections where he writes extensively about how the corruption in the Ottoman palace was started with the marriage of Bayezid I with Olivera Despina. He underlines the Serbian influence as a disastrous one for the Turkishness several times and clearly. However, when it comes to rebellion itself very surprisingly he skips the subject.

Yılmaz Öztuna, as a moderate right wing writer, approaches the issue with a different point of view. He relates the Serbian independence movement to burning down of the Serbian towns with Pazvandoğlu Osman Ağa's attacks to

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<sup>146</sup> Danismend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 4). p. 83.

<sup>147</sup> Rıza Nur, & Kiliç, E. (1978). *Türk tarihi* (Vol. 3). pp. 279-284.

Ottoman fortresses and the oppression of the Janissaries who are anything but soldiers. With this formulation of the Serbian issue, he criticizes the administrative weakness that led to disturbances in the Serbian lands. He states “This nation’s rebellion against the Turkish rule was not completely unjust. They were not the *reaya* that were treated with mercy by the state anymore. Janissaries in and around Belgrade were treating the Serbs just like dogs. These Janissaries even killed Hacı Mustafa Pasha, the guardian of Belgrade.”<sup>148</sup> Öztuna, furthermore, gives the year 1806 as the starting date of the Serbian rebellion instead of 1804 and he is sure about its nationalistic nature under the influence of the French Revolution.

On the other hand, the lesson that Babiali has to take from this movement according to Öztuna is the need for the establishment of a modern army to protect these Balkan lands where Turks constitute a majority just like Anatolia.<sup>149</sup> Unlike his approach to rebellion issue, the idea of Turkishness in Balkan lands is far-fetched. Even if it is assumed that his calculation of Turks include the Muslim societies like the Albanians and Bosniaks, it is obvious that the case of Turkish majority cannot be true for Serbia.

The first president of the Türk Tarih Kurumu, Yusuf Akçura explains the Serbian uprising, with the date of 1805, in his book *Osmanlı Devletinin Dağılma Devri* (“The Period of Disintegration of the Ottoman State”). According to Akçura, there was neither janissary oppression nor killing of Serbs on behalf of the Ottoman forces. Rather it was an internal dispute among the Ottoman soldiers and Serbs immediately wanted to exploit the issue. They rebelled and plundered Belgrade. Russians also have been provoking the Christians, who were Turkish subjects, since the time of Petro I (reigned: 1682-1725) and they did provoke Serbs with this occasion as well.<sup>150</sup> Further, he concurs with other historians like Akşin, by expressing the second factor for the rebellion as the nationalism and Slavism that were developed in the Austrian lands.

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<sup>148</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 6). p.391.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid. pp.391-401.

<sup>150</sup> Akçura, Y. (1988). *Osmanlı devletinin dağılma devri: (XVIII.ve XIX. asırlarda)* (3rd ed.). Istanbul: Türk Tarih Kurumu. p. 15-16.



As an Islamist historian, Ziya Nur Aksun has a significant contribution for the understanding of the Serbian revolt in Turkey. Although in *İslâm Tarihi* it is only stated that “Serbian rebellion occurred in 1804”<sup>151</sup> without any further detail, it is possible to find some more information in his six-volume work *Osmanlı Tarihi*. Aksun states:

“The Balkan nations who forgot that they could be able keep their national character only thanks to Ottomans and who have always been shorn of a consciousness of history, started to rebel with the efforts of Russian agents as well. These tiny Balkan nations, who lived a peaceful life under Ottoman protection, were provoked to rebel against their benevolent and just overlords by the capture of their priests and with the help of the money. After all, these tiny states became toys for European states, ending in disappointment. Independence turned out to be disastrous for these states.”<sup>152</sup>

In this amazing understanding of the history there is neither a question about the long-lasting wars of the 18th century nor any kind of misadministration on behalf of the Ottoman government. Furthermore, he believes that actually Janissaries were the real victims of this process as these important border soldiers were deprived from their incomes and Serbs were set free by the mistaken Pashas who collaborated with the Serbs.<sup>153</sup> Other interesting themes by Aksun for this chapter of the Ottoman history could be given too. Still in 1812, he argues, Serbian people were not supporting their rebellious leaders. In his narrative, Aksun occasionally calls Serbs and Montenegrins as “wild” (“vahşi”) and mountainous (“dağlı”) people which have undoubtedly pejorative connotations in the Turkish language. Finally, if it was not for the abolition of national the janissary army, which he believes was a disastrous event, none of the Balkan nations could have become separated from the Ottoman Empire.

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<sup>151</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (2006). *İslâm tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 128-133.

<sup>152</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (1994). *Osmanlı tarihi: Osmanlı devleti'nin tahlilli, tenkidli siyasi târihi* (Vol. 3). p. 33. “Milli karakterlerini Osmanlı sayesinde korumuş olduklarını unutan ve tarih şuurundan daima yoksun olan Balkan kavimleri, Rus ajanların da çalışmalarıyla isyana başlamışlardır. Osmanlı himayesinde rahat ve asude bir hayat süren bu küçük Balkan halkları, papazları elde edilerek para ve yardımlar ile satın alınarak velinimetleri olan büyük ve adil metbularına karşı isyana teşvik edilmişlerdir. Zaten bu küçük devletler Avrupalı devletlerin oyuncağı haline gelip ileride hüsrana uğramışlardır. İstiklal bu devletler için felaket olmuştur.”

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. p. 76.

It appears to be that the provocation of the Great Powers is a shared theme by almost all the historians in order to explain the Serbian uprising and Zuhuri Danişman is not an exception in this sense as he believes Russians started their provocation from 1805 onwards in order to counter-balance the French influence in the region and good relations that were being established between Napoleon and Selim III. Also, in terms of nationalism in Serbia, Danişman argues that it has always been existent due to the Ottoman tolerance on Christian subjects which enabled Serbs to keep their church and monasteries as they were until the 19th century. This is how they transferred their identity and traditions through the generations.<sup>154</sup>

Furthermore, it is possible to deduce from the Danişman's narrative that nationalism played a crucial role in the beginning of the Serbian uprising. This already built-in nationalistic ideal in Serbia was used by Russia in order to harm the Ottoman Empire from the inside. With all the effort, in Danişman's words:

“Serbs *decided to make a rebellion*. However, since they knew that such a rebellion would be suppressed by the state they looked for a solution to make it look legitimate. They finally found the justification in the unruly Janissaries who were called *dayıs*, treated the people badly and acted as bandits”<sup>155</sup>

This idea shows that, just as Akşin argues, Serbs kept their real nationalistic intentions and aspirations secret in the uprising and made it look like it was a problem with the local administration.

### **3.2. Steps towards the Independent Serbia: 1816-78**

The eventful period that led to the independent Serbia was discussed in detail by the Turkish historians. Therefore, the focus will be on the rhetorical aspect, language and discourse, rather than the chronological political history.

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<sup>154</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 11). pp. 150-151.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.* p. 213. My italics: “Sırplar isyana karar vermişlerdi.”

There is not much detail in Danişmend's narrative until things get complicated in Belgrade in year 1862. He mentions that Serbian head knez Miloş Obrenović was approved by the Istanbul government as the hereditary prince of Serbia in 1830. After 1860s, Serbs are fully determined to push the Turks out of Belgrade and Serbia. While trying everything to reach this goal, Serbs never stopped playing the innocent towards the European public opinion since because although they secured almost unlimited aid from Russia, it was obvious that without the western powers, they would not get what was intended. In such a tense environment, one incident pulled the trigger. A Serb, who wanted to get water before a Turkish soldier was killed by him and this led to a huge turmoil in Belgrade. Serbs, who were obviously looking for this kind of reason, rebelled, plundered the Muslim sector of the city and attacked barracks as well as houses. Guardian of the fortress, Aşir Pasha, bombarded the town. This event became very symbolic in depicting the rightfulness and victimization of the Serbs in European eyes. While Britain and Austria were a bit resistant, Russia and France immediately intervened to the issue and made sure that Serbs were favored. From 1862 onwards, Muslims in Belgrade could only live in the fortress and garrisons in the city were left to Serbs. According to Danişmend, although the articles of the protocol clearly favored the Serbs and unjust for "Turkey" they were still unhappy.<sup>156</sup> Almost by using the same words, Akşin states the fact that Serbs would be content with nothing but complete freedom and he mentions about the pro-Serbs European public opinion.<sup>157</sup> Actually, soon, last four fortresses in Ottoman control were left to Serbs with both flags hoisted however, Danişmend says, "the existence of the Turkish flag alongside the Serbian flag was only to satisfy the national pride" and had no real meaning at all.<sup>158</sup>

Coming towards the last quarter of the century, Russia centered and oriented Slavic associations were working harder than ever in order to prepare the Serbian, Bosnian, Montenegrin and Bulgarian Christians for their "bloody roles"

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<sup>156</sup> Danismend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 4). pp. 198-203.

<sup>157</sup> Aksin, S. (Ed.). (2005). *Türkiye tarihi*. p. 140.

<sup>158</sup> Danismend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 4). p. 215.

against their Ottoman rulers and they were provided with money, arms and ammunition secretly.<sup>159</sup> With this approach, to Herzegovina rebellion of 1875 and coming great Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, Danişmend has a writing style that implies without Russian provocation none of these would have happened. Serbs on the other hand, were active in supporting the Herzegovina rebellion with volunteers and therefore “Turks had to fight against Serbs besides the rebels”. Also, during the Bulgarian rebellion of 1876, Serbian agents, besides the Russians, were there to help the Bulgarians.<sup>160</sup> It is understood that by this time Serbs has even the means to help other rebellions. Regarding the Serbian inclusion to Russo-Ottoman War, Danişmend argues that, after the fall of Pleven Serbs broke their peace agreement and declared war with a very pragmatist move. They advanced as far as Niş.<sup>161</sup>

Furthermore, Rıza Nur gives less historical detail but surely more comments on the events. According to him, the idea of nationalism could be observed among Serbs and Bulgarians from 1850 onwards and despite the Paris Treaty of 1856 banned Russians to intervene Ottoman politics, they did intervene frequently to use these ideas against the Ottoman Empire on the ground that the Christian subjects were being oppressed.<sup>162</sup> Similar to Danişmend, Rıza Nur do not directly blame the Balkan nations for rebellions and underlines the Russian intrigues. In many occasions he uses “Russian provocation”, “Russian agents’ provocation” and “Ignatiev’s Panislavist policies” as explanatory factors. On the 1877-78 Russo-Ottoman War’s result, he says “Berlin Treaty, as others, was an outcome of Russian and other western states’ efforts and with this war they “hanged the Balkan nations to our neck just like a dagger.”<sup>163</sup> As a general note on the issues of the 19th century, Rıza Nur states that “Russian and European enmity for Turks is well-known. They have been using Serbs, Bulgarians,

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<sup>159</sup> Danismend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 4). p. 246.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. p. 251-252.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. p. 307.

<sup>162</sup> Rıza Nur, & Kiliç, E. (1978). *Türk tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 303.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. p. 315.

Armenians and alike in order to reach their aims. Serbs and other subject nations enforced the provocations that were made against us.”<sup>164</sup>

Yılmaz Öztuna, unlike his approach to fourteenth and fifteenth century’s history, gives more dates and events and less comments. His narrative on the 19th century Serbia, however, surely includes nationalistic references. For instance, he writes “it is known that Montenegrins are Serbs”, “Fortress of Belgrade was conquered by Suleyman I [...]. Turkish garrisons and people were leaving the fortress. However; the Turkish flag was going to continue flapping”<sup>165</sup> or “... principdom of Serbia and Montenegro that were part of the Turkish Empire.”<sup>166</sup> These few of many examples show that this is the era of nationalism undoubtedly and each state has to be associated with one ethnic or national grouping.

Besides, the general idea of Öztuna regarding the 1816-1867 period is the gradual loss of Serbia without attributing much will on Serbs and emphasizing heavily on Russian and French influence for this loss. The reader possibly is to understand that without these interventions, Serbian people would stay in Ottoman realms, which is very suitable to the 14th century narrative of Ottoman expansion which brought a just rule to the Balkans. For instance, it is underlined by all right wing historians that Serbian prince Mihailo Obrenović came to Istanbul in order to thank personally for the grace of the sultan by bestowing the control of the fortress of Belgrade to Serbs.<sup>167</sup> Serbs’ rebellion is by no means a self motivated one in this case. They are all driven by the Russian foreign politics and it is hard to guess whether they would rebel without such a power backing them like this. Although this theme of content Serbs and Balkan people is much more visible in Ziya Nur Aksun’s narratives, Öztuna’s approach is similar too.

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<sup>164</sup> Rıza Nur, & Kiliç, E. (1978). *Türk tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 112.

<sup>165</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 7). p. 70.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* p. 123.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* p. 70.

Furthermore; in this period Ottoman rule was in its last fifty-years and Serbia was lost in practice. Even in such conditions, according to Öztuna, the state shows grace to Serbs and in return the Serbian prince comes all the way to Istanbul to show his gratitude. This seems to be a dream of the fourteenth century since an Ottoman state that bestows out of greatness is depicted for the readers.

Coming closer to the great Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-78, Öztuna describes the “Turkey”. While Serbia and Montenegro principalities were only Russian toys<sup>168</sup>, they were very useful for weakening the empire. If the rebellions were to turn into a war, this would definitely mean a terrible loss of national interests against the European imperialism. “Turkey” was also in a very disadvantageous position both geographically, as being open to invasion and intervention, and demographically for not having a national unity unlike Japan who have not started her modernization neither but had the geographical advantage and national unity.<sup>169</sup> This section could solely be sufficient to indicate how vital and fundamental the idea of nationhood in Öztuna’s conception. He both refers to empire as the Turkish Empire and also regrets that its national unity has not completed yet.

Although Öztuna describes quite a dire situation for the Ottoman Empire during the last quarter of the 19th century, there are contradictory expressions that would boost the national pride. On October 29th, 1876, right before the Tersane Conference, the Serbian army that was commanded by Russian general Chernyayev was defeated by the Turkish army in Aleksinac battle. While Turkish army was advancing towards Belgrade, Russia gave an ultimatum. Then, Öztuna says, “The Sublime Porte bestowed a two-months truce to its rebellious Serbian subjects”<sup>170</sup> It is not easily understandable how could Istanbul government have “bestowed” a truce to rebellious Serbian subjects when it is being done right after a Russian ultimatum. A similar situation was stated during

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<sup>168</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 7). p. 146.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* p. 127.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.* p. 134.

the reign of Abdülhamid II. In this era, Öztuna argues, Serbia, Montenegro and Romania were in balance. Bulgarian autonomous and Serbian independent princes were “loyal servants” of the Sultan Hamid. They were receiving their salaries from him and in the meantime “Nikola, the old prince of Montenegro, was unhappy since he could not have these honors.”<sup>171</sup> Even after the independence of Serbia, Öztuna prefers to perceive and introduce the situation as such to the readers. This is a very grandiose discourse compared to the political realities. He obviously wants this state to be a nationally united Turkish Empire, an oxymoron so to say, and even the state that gained independence still be called as “bende” (“slave”).

For this period of Ottoman-Serbian history, Islamist historian Ziya Nur Aksun has actually a similar style of writing with his narrative of early Ottoman history. He frequently uses belittling terms like “wild” (“vahşi”), mountainous (“dağlı”) or “tiny subject of ours was disciplined” for the Balkan nations.<sup>172</sup>

Aksun, just like Danişmend, argues about the Serbian pragmatism for inclusion to war only after the fall of Plevna to get a share from the “Turkey bequest” and he also qualifies this alliance as a crusade unlike any other historian.<sup>173</sup> This actually is a brilliant paragraph to observe how entangled the nationalism and Islamic sensitiveness in Turkish historiography and particularly Aksun’s narrative.

As seen previously, Aksun really a historian that emphasizes the Turkishness of the Ottoman Empire and the national pride. It could be useful to have two quotes that Aksun had incorporated to his history. First one is about Serbian prince Milan’s visit to Istanbul. Regarding his request of two districts’ addition to his control, the sultan gives a proud and dignified reply: “I may send my glorious troops to protect you from any danger. But for enlarging territory, I do not have such authority since every inch of those lands was taken in return for the blood

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<sup>171</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 7). p. 185.

<sup>172</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (2006). *İslâm tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 147.

<sup>173</sup> Aksun, Z. N., & Kiling, E. (2010). *II. Abdülhamid Han*. Beyoğlu, İstanbul: Ötüken. p. 127.

of the martyrs.”<sup>174</sup> Secondly the letter of Chernyayev to Russian Tsar is added to Aksun’s narrative in order to depict the successes of the Ottoman army in Aleksinac in October 1876. According to Chernyayev the main reason for the defeat was the extremely positive memories that were alive in Serbian people’s minds. He believes that it is possible to create an army of Serbs from nothing and send them to death but he was unable to transcend these memories. “Turkish sovereignty, just like a mind dazzling magician’s trick, had taken these places. We have to beat not only the Turks but their history as well.” are Chernyayev’s exact words to describe the situation.<sup>175</sup>

The last Turkish historian on the subject, Zuhuri Danişman has a similar approach with İsmail Hami Danişmend especially in the description of the events in Belgrade between 1862 and 1867. However, Danişman decides not to incorporate the story about the killed Serb who wanted to get water before an Ottoman soldier. He suffices to write that “the relations between Muslims and Serbs became intense and there were killings on both sides.”<sup>176</sup> After Serbs rebelled and Muslims took refuge in the fortress guardian Aşir Pasha used artillery to push the Serbs away. In this case, Danişman argues strongly that with this action “Turks were completely rightful” however due to the protests of foreign diplomatic missions in Belgrade and European newspapers’ fake news on how Serbs were killed in the events, Serbs were favored. He also believes that Serbs who were under the influence of constant provocation of the French and Russian foreign policy were not happy with the result that actually favored them over the Ottoman Empire. Regarding the events of Belgrade in 1862-67 periods, İsmail Hami Danişmend, Yılmaz Öztuna and Zuhuri Danişman write with almost same style and word with negligible differences. Danişman too adds that Mihailo came to Istanbul to thank the sultan for giving the castle to Serbs but only with a plain description and not in an overlooking way.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (2006). *İslâm tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 151.

<sup>175</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (1994). *Osmanlı tarihi : Osmanlı devleti'nin tahlilli, tenkidli siyasi târihi* (Vol. 4). p. 194.

<sup>176</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 12). p. 149.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. pp. 149-153.



According to Danişman, Russia in this period was planning to establish an empire that encompasses all the Slavs in the Balkans. To reach this end, an association was opened in Moscow by Chancellor Gorchakov. Likewise, textbooks that has the idea of Slavic unity were sent to Serbian schools and “young people who were our subjects were taken to Russian universities”.<sup>178</sup> This period of propaganda gave results in 1876. Serbs and Montenegrins agreed and declared war to whom that they were supposed to be subjects. They were all very sure about the Russian support and even armies were commanded by the Russian general Chernyayev. The following chapters of these event are similarly knit with Russian support, Turkish army’s successes and Turkish invasion southern Serbia. That is to say, in the right wing history writing it is claimed almost with no exception that a Serbian insurrection movement is predominantly a result of Russian intervention and support. While this argumentation overlooks the Serbian national formation and refers no power and will at all to Serbian people or the leaders –except the will to betray the Turks and collaborate with the Russians-it also prematurely emphasizes the Turkishness of the Ottoman state and army.

### 3.3. Independent Serbia

Usually Turkish historians do not specifically write about the Serbia that gained independence recently in their Ottoman histories, but still it is possible to deduce some information between the lines. For instance, İsmail Hami Danişmend argues that during the first Macedonian Revolution in 1902, Serbian agents alongside the Russian had a significant role.<sup>179</sup> This information implies that Serbian state has the will and power to intervene the surrounding regions in a very direct manner.

For this period, the things that Rıza Nur has to say are much more intense. He believes that “[i]f we had the policies of representation, undoubtedly those lands would still be ours. Furthermore, in those lands Turkishness has more right than

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<sup>178</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 13). p. 23.

<sup>179</sup> Danismend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 4). p. 345.

the Serbs.”<sup>180</sup> Rıza Nur, therefore, ascribes very little right for Serbs to live and rule in those lands and for him the reason that Serbia was lost is the policies that gave too much freedom for them.

There are also important ideas in Ziya Nur Aksun’s narrative for Serbia, after her independence. According to Aksun, the post-Berlin Conference period left Serbia and Montenegro frustrated who were expecting to share Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is one of the main reasons that rendered Serbia aggressive and hateful towards the neighboring states. This was best shown in their greed and aspirations for Macedonia.<sup>181</sup> With this explanation it is firstly understood that Serbia is now a hateful and irredentist state for the surrounding Christian states. Secondly, Serbia was used and cheated by Russia and were not given what she was promised. As the region became a powder keg with these developments and was heading to a great war, Aksun thinks maybe it could after all these pain and suffering that the Serbs and other petty Balkan states could understand how good and prosperous the Sultan Abdülhamid II rule was. He writes “The nations that lived in the lands he once ruled faced great tragedies and suffer, hence; they kept the Sultan’s age of prosperity and happiness as a sweet memory in their minds.”<sup>182</sup> It is shown in Aksun’s narrative clearly that let alone being happy about independence; Serbs regretted turning their back to Ottomans. However; it was too late.

As a general note on the developments in Serbia in the independent era, Jelavich gives direct information. In this narrative, it is also argued that Serbia did not achieved great social and political goals for its people and economical activities of 1810s did not differ much that of even 1930s. Surely these problems in Serbia were not due to betrayal to Ottomans in Jelavich, rather caused by bad political leadership, self-interested, wealth accumulating elite and nepotism.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Rıza Nur, & Kiliç, E. (1978). *Türk tarihi* (Vol. 4). p. 77.

<sup>181</sup> Aksun, Z. N., & Kiliç, E. (2010). *II. Abdülhamid Han*. p. 179.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.* p. 583.

<sup>183</sup> Jelavich, B. (1983). *History of the Balkans*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press., p. 59.

## CHAPTER 4 CHARACTERS

The previous two chapters discuss the political events of the Ottoman-Serbian common history in a chronological manner; in this chapter, the focus will be on the characters that would hopefully provide direct images and depictions of the prominent Serbs in the early Ottoman history as were narrated in the popular historiography.

### 4.1. Serbs in the Early Ottoman Period

Almost without exception, Turkish historians agree that Dušan was a great commander and had aspired to the throne of the Byzantine Empire. His reign not only represented the first encounter that Ottomans had with the Serbs but also with a king who wanted gain the control of the same region, namely the Bytina and southern Balkans regions. However, important he was as ruler there is noneless very little information regarding his character and his political ideology. It is only Öztuna who dwells upon the subject and relates Dušan to Ottoman politics.

According to Öztuna, Dušan's goal was to eventually become the emperor of the Byzantine lands. It was under his command that the Serbian army pushed into Macedonia, at the expense of the Byzantines. And this military act led to a political alliance between the Byzantine Empire and Orhan. Actually, it was Dušan who first wanted to make an alliance with Orhan against the Byzantines by offering his daughter to one of Orhan's sons. However, this offer was not welcomed by Orhan. As Öztuna argues, "establishment of a Slavic empire in the Balkans was completely against Turkish politics."<sup>184</sup> In this sense, Dušan identifies the first Slavic fear of Turks. Although at this point in history the validity of a Slavic union as a political ideology in the Serbian lands is problematic and doubtful, Öztuna accepts this notion for the purposes of his

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<sup>184</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 2). p.271.

argument and explains that this Turks vs. Slavs clash has been an determinant dynamic of the Balkans politics right from the 14th century up until the 20th century. Here, for six hundred years, are the three states struggling for political power in the region. Through a reliance on the concepts of “danger” (i.e. the Serbian or Slavic danger) and “alliance”, which refers to a search for a power balance between Byzantium and the Ottomans, Öztuna explains the potential rise for both Ottoman and Serbian states as what makes them natural enemies.

Furthermore, regarding King Lazar and the Lazarević family some information could be found from the time of the Kosovo Battle to Ottoman Interregnum in the Turkish narratives as well. Generally King Lazar was described as a proud commander, certain about the victory in Kosovo. This trait was very visible, for instance in Zuhuri Danişman’s narrative as the sarcastic Serbian envoy comes to the Ottoman military quarters to boast about Serbian army in front of Murad I. All historians who have written about the Kosovo Battle of 1389 agree that King Lazar was either killed in the Battle field or executed in front of the sultan’s tent after the battle.<sup>185</sup> Only Ziya Nur Aksun writes that Bayezid negotiated with the King without giving his name.<sup>186</sup> Aksun is either mistaken or should have referred to one of Lazar’s sons (most probably Stefan) as the new king.

Miloš is also a significant character of the Kosovo Battle as he killed Sultan Murad I. This killing was mentioned by Öztuna, Danişman, Danişmend and Aksun as a tricky one. On the one hand, Miloš could achieve this regicide by telling one irresistible lie, regarding his conversion to Islam to the Sultan, an act which makes him a manipulative liar in the eyes of the Turkish readers. On the other hand, historians, such as; Ziya Nur Aksun and Zuhuri Danişman suggest that this false conversion has nothing to do with Serbian nationalism or his identity as a war hero; rather, Miloš murdered the Sultan to erase his name from an assertion made by his rival, a very personal issue.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 2). p.226.

<sup>186</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (2006). *İslâm tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 23.

<sup>187</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 2). p.226.

Bayezid I (known in history by his war prowess as Bayazid the Thunderbolt) and his reign was one of those times during which the Serbs were extremely active in Ottoman politics and military. Despite the predominantly underestimating approach to the good relations between Serbs and the Ottomans in the aftermath of the Kosovo Battle, instead of struggle and fight, cooperation and alliance is observed. Regarding this coexistence, differing ideas and a variety of narratives have been asserted by popular Turkish historiography.

One historian, Zuhuri Danişman, in this sense praises Bayezid I for his benevolent policy towards Serbia. He, instead of destroying Serbia, made her a vassal territory and this action resulted with appreciation, rather than hatred, among the Serbs for Ottoman rule. Stefan agreed to pay a yearly tribute, send soldiers upon request and marry his sister Olivera Despina to Bayezid. Danişman believes that Bayezid's policy of cooperation with Serbs yielded very good results as Serbs supported Ottomans against the Hungarian expansion and fought loyally in the Battle of Ankara in 1402. Regarding this alliance, Danişman makes an interesting analogy as well. He writes "a very beneficial relationship was established between the Ottomans and Serbia [with this marriage]. Indeed it was seen that Serbian forces fought loyally in the battles of Nicopolis and Ankara. Just like Bayezid stayed loyal to his wife until the end of his life, Serbs stayed loyal to Ottomans."<sup>188</sup> Similar to Dušan's unsuccessful attempt to establish alliance with Orhan, with the marriage of Stefan's sister (Lazar's daughter) with Bayezid I, Ottoman common history with Serbia was once more defined with a Serbian princess.

Danişman also includes his narrative the opportunity that Bayezid I gave them to gather war booty. This idea of a 'mutually beneficial relationship' between Ottomans and Serbs that could be deduced in Danişman's narrative is almost unique in the popular historiography in Turkey. There is no ambiguity in the good nature of the relations between the two in Danişman's history.

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<sup>188</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 2). p. 250.

While Serbian contributions have been discussed and explained negatively and positively by the popular historians, Ziya Nur Aksun, on the contrary, completely neglects the issue. In his *İslam Tarihi* there are no references to the marriage of Olivera Despina to the Sultan, her brothers' support for the Ankara Battle, and the establishment of Ottoman-Serbian family ties.<sup>189</sup>

Öztuna includes the Serbian soldiers in his explanation of the Ankara Battle. He argues that around 10.000 Serbian soldiers were located in the left wing of the Ottoman army and they were controlled by Stefan Lazarević, Bayezid's brother-in-law.<sup>190</sup> However, according to Öztuna, once the situation of the battle became disadvantageous for the Ottomans, Serbs retreated and escaped from the battlefield. Against this argument, Nicolas Vatin believes that Serbs were only loyal forces to Bayezid I with the Janissaries in the most fragile phase of the Battle of Ankara. While Bayezid's situation was desperate, Stefan Lazarević protected Prince Suleyman which, according to Vatin, was an attitude to keep the state standing and alive in the midst of a terrible defeat.<sup>191</sup>

The marriage of Bayezid I with the Serbian princess Olivera Despina has attracted a great deal of attention from Turkish historians from all camps. Rıza Nur, in this regard, is surely the most striking historian with his extremely critical and harsh stance. Rıza Nur several times argues that although the first sultans lived simply and had good morals, with the coming of Olivera Despina, corruption, indecency, libation and pederasty started at the time of Bayezid I. He believes that

“It is this woman that familiarized the Thunderbolt to libation. So it is understood that these foreign women were the illness of this Turkish dynasty. His vizier Osman Pasha, too, familiarized him to sodomy. Then the boys that he used for his own enjoyment were given *timars*, official posts and used as bureaucrats. These boys were taken among Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Russians and alike non-Turkish foreign lands. These are documented information. The filth and low character

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<sup>189</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (2006). *İslâm tarihi* (Vol. 3). pp. 23-28.

<sup>190</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 2). p. 345.

<sup>191</sup> Vatin, N. in Mantran, R. (ed.). (1999). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi*. (S. Tanilli, Trans.) (2nd ed.). p. 66.

that the Thunderbolt has started (with his wife) continued for centuries.”<sup>192</sup>

Furthermore, Yılmaz Öztuna dedicates a section to the mothers and wives of the sultans. He argues that in the 14th century most of the sultan’s wives were of Anatolian Turkish origin, such as the daughters of Karaman, Candar, Dulkadir, Germiyan principalities. He adds that they also married some Serbians as well. Without giving any names, Öztuna writes that the Serbian princess wives of Bayezid I and Murad II are famous. Yet it appears that they are not sufficiently famous for their names to be mentioned. In the eighty-page long section of his book, Öztuna suffices to write that they kept their Christian faith, and supported Turkish policies in Serbia. The latter is exemplified by, Mehmed II’s Serbian step-mother, Mara, who served as a political tool.<sup>193</sup> Thus, she only is once mentioned as the Fatih’s political tool for the Balkans and no other name was given. Öztuna’s brief and cautious approach to the issue could be caused by a defensive idea that proves to his readers the fact that marriage occurred only due to the political expectations, making the subject a complete taboo for the Turkish readers.

It might not be a far-fetched idea to argue that, the omission regarding the mothers and wives of the sultans with foreign and non-Turkic background implies the protectionist feelings that the author bears and is actually an intentional choice. In this section, Öztuna underlines that the princesses of Turkish and Anatolian dynastic origin constitute a clear plurality among the wives of the sultans. Is hardly understandable, however, what kind of an idea of plurality he wants to give to the readers if Nilüfer (Holofira), Olivera Despina and Mara were to be omitted. Furthermore; in Öztuna’s book *Osmanlı Padişahları’nın Hayat Hikâyeleri* (“Life Stories of the Ottoman Sultans”) there is no single reference to Olivera Despina in the Bayezid the Thunderbolt section;<sup>194</sup> furthermore, in the Mehmed II section he writes “his step-mother, the Serbian princess Mara has taught many things, probably Serbian language as

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<sup>192</sup> Rıza Nur, & Kiliç, E. (1978). *Türk tarihi* (Vol. 4). p. 37; 56.

<sup>193</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 8). p. 209.

<sup>194</sup> Öztuna, Y. (2005). *Osmanlı padişahlarının hayat hikâyeleri*. İstanbul: Ötüken. pp. 9-35.

well.”<sup>195</sup> This mention is the only one regarding the Serbian princesses in the entire book.

Ziya Nur Aksun’s approach regarding Princess Olivera Despina is also very significant. Actually, Aksun’s basic approach is to exclude her from the Ottoman history. Regarding neither Olivera nor her brothers a single word could be found. However, his writings about Bayezid’s character reveal some indirect information. Aksun puts so much effort to save Bayezid from the criticisms by some “old and new historians” and emphasizes heavily his good nature and Islamic values such as keeping away from alcohol and regularly praying, that it becomes obvious that those criticisms are related to Olivera Despina and her alleged negative influence on him.<sup>196</sup> Furthermore, it is not possible to find information regarding the existence of Serbian soldiers in the Battle of Ankara, the interregnum struggles and princess Mara’s marriage with Murad II in Aksun’s narrative. To sum up, it is understood that Ziya Nur Aksun, as an Islamist historian, is not happy with and sensitive towards some parts of the Ottoman history; hence he omits any parts that might tarnish the character of his subject, preferring to glorify him over Islamic values.

Furthermore; Necip Fazıl, another Islamist author, argues quite the contrary. With reference to his wife, he argues that Bayezid’s problematic situation was almost destroying the Turkish society which was at its one of the highest degrees of ambition and livelihood. While one Islamist author sees nothing wrong in the Bayezid I era, the other criticizes him heavily for letting in foreign blood. During the Battle of Ankara, as Necip Fazıl further argues, the illness of foreign blood was apparent both in Janissaries and in “so-called loyal to Turks” Serbian King’s attitudes who deserted the battlefield.<sup>197</sup>

Finally, Zuhuri Danişman briefly mentions the relationship between Bayezid I, Olivera and alcohol. He argues that Bayezid drank alcohol from time to time,

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<sup>195</sup> Öztuna, Y. (2005). *Osmanlı padisahlarının hayat hikâyeleri*. p. 63.

<sup>196</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (1994). *Osmanlı tarihi : Osmanlı devleti'nin tahlilli, tenkidli siyasi târihi* (Vol. 1). p. 88.

<sup>197</sup> Kisakürek, N. F. (2001). *Yeniçeri* (8th ed.). Istanbul: Büyük Doğu Yayınları. p. 25.



just as Osman and Orhan did, but this never reached the level to prevent him from ruling the state properly. Danişman writes “He was extremely fond of his wife Olivera, however; that would not be pleasant to claim that he got used to alcohol and did not care about the state because of her.”<sup>198</sup> Also, he emphasizes that Serbs were active in the Ottoman palace without any reference to a negative influence or blame on Olivera Despina. Danişman is by far the most open historian about this issue.

#### 4.2. Servants of the Sultan

Murad I’s usage of war prisoners for a stable manpower supply was institutionalized at the time of Bayezid and until the early 17th century Ottoman state selected Christian boys to educate them as soldiers and officials. These boys, once received, converted to Islam and were taught the necessary information to become the servants of the Ottoman sultans.<sup>199</sup> Köprülü also argues that the janissary force that was composed of young prisoners was at first a standing infantry in the company of the sultan. The cavalry force created by the timar-holding sipahis, however, constituted the greatest military force of the Ottoman state. In the 14th century, the Janissaries were not of major importance. It was only in the fifteenth century during the reign of Murad II that the principle of *devshirme* was instituted in a systematic manner.<sup>200</sup>

It is obvious that the issue is controversial from both sides. Before discussing the Turkish historians’ ideas and comments on the *devshirme* system, Yerasimos explains the general nature of the practice of *devshirme* in the Ottoman Empire from the Christian families’ point of view. He believes that it was actually welcomed by the families in most cases if the regulations are well applied. He even claims that families offered their children to the officers that came to village for this purpose. With this act, they were expecting to better feed

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<sup>198</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 118.

<sup>199</sup> Finkel, C. (2005). *Osman’s dream : the story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923*. p. 28.

<sup>200</sup> Köprülü, M. F., & Leiser, G. (1992). *The origins of the Ottoman empire*. Albany: State University of New York Press. p. 115.

themselves better with one less person at home and, more importantly, a possible future benefit from their son who could become a high ranking official. As proof, he states that there have been commanders that changed their route during the campaigns to see and make favors to their families. According to Yerasimos “the image of janissary that turning back to kill his infidel family” is a false or contrived idea that belongs to 19th century romantic nationalism. He steadfastly claims that these devshirme soldiers or officials knew their hometowns and families, and continued their relationships.<sup>201</sup> Whatever is written in the romantic nationalist histories of the Balkan states, Vatin, too, believes that with this practice Ottomans by no means aimed to brain-wash Christian youth, rather the goal was to sustain loyalty to the sultan.<sup>202</sup>

#### 4.2.1. Janissaries

Turkish historians have a set of differing ideas regarding the nature and importance of the janissary army. Especially those that took Janissaries as a Christian army downplayed their importance. For instance, İsmail Hami Danişmend argues that the role of Janissaries for the Ottoman expansion and success in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was extremely exaggerated. He argues that at the heyday of the empire they made up maximum 10.000 soldiers and did not took active part in the conquests. For him the janissary force was solely a guardian unit that stood close to sultan and they did many things that benefitted the enemy, as well as direct acts against the sultan.<sup>203</sup>

To Danişmend’s contrast, Yerasimos believes that janissary army achieved amazing successes, keeping in mind their limited number of 12.000. Although they were only one of the six infantry corps, their capabilities in the battlefields

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<sup>201</sup> Yerasimos, S. (2001). *Azgelismislik sürecinde Türkiye: 1. Bizans’tan Tanzimat’a*. (B. Kuzucu, Trans.). Istanbul: Belge yayinlari. p. 297.

<sup>202</sup> Vatin, N. in Mantran, R. (ed.). (1999). *Osmanli Imparatorlugu tarihi*. (S. Tanilli, Trans.) (2nd ed.). p. 65.

<sup>203</sup> Danismend, I. H. (1971). *İzahlı Osmanlı tarihi kronolojisi* (Vol. 4). p.109.

were great.<sup>204</sup> In Yerasimos conception, therefore, the janissary army is an extremely significant. Halil İnalçık, in this regard, is in the same line with Yerasimos. Although smaller in number, he writes, Janissaries gave a clear superiority to the Ottomans as these soldiers were the first standing and organized army in Europe and were under direct command of the sultan.<sup>205</sup> İnalçık, therefore, ascribes a special role to the janissary force, without caring to refer to issues that concern their ethnicity.

Although he is not a historian, it is a fact that Necip Fazıl Kısakürek has an important influence on the understanding of history in the Turkish people's minds with his books, such as *Yeniçeri* and *Ulu Hakan Abdülhamid*. He refers to the establishment of janissary army as a possibly useful novelty in order to “make use of the defeated ones” and protect the “Muslim and Turkish element”. However, he believes that this positive outcome could not be achieved. As the main reason, Necip Fazıl writes:

“Unless the foreign element and blood are integrated into the body, insofar as the loss of their least bit of independence, by bashing them in the mortar of Islam and Turkishness, the result will be nothing but death. Thusly, after a short period of time, because it had not felt the due material and spiritual pressure upon itself, the *Rum*<sup>206</sup> blood began to take revenge from the Turk in the Turkish army.”<sup>207</sup>

He further discusses that the disaster that happened at Bayezid's time was due to the foreign blood that established itself in the heart of the Ottoman state: Janissaries and Bayezid's wife. Also, regarding the Haçova Battle where Janissaries deserted the battlefield, Necip Fazıl writes very explicitly: “The Janissary did what he would have done, but the pure blood of the Muslim-Turk saved his fatherland, sultan and the banner of the prophet”<sup>208</sup> Another example

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<sup>204</sup> Yerasimos, S. (2001). *Azgelismislik sürecinde Türkiye: 1. Bizans'tan Tanzimat'a*. (B. Kuzucu, Trans.). p. 299.

<sup>205</sup> İnalçık, H. (2007). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu klasik çağ (1300-1600)*. p. 17.

<sup>206</sup> Although direct translation could be “Greek” it could be regarded as the Orthodox people of the Eastern Roman Empire as well.

<sup>207</sup> Kısakürek, N. F. (2001). *Yeniçeri* (8th ed.). p. 19.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.* p. 59.

could be taken from the section that the killing of Osman II was explained: “The Young Osman disaster is the eternal spot that an army nurtured by poisonous and purulent foreign blood put on the honor of the Turk.”<sup>209</sup> Necip Fazıl clearly claims that the “corrupt origins” of the janissary army and the established circle of treason that consisted of the courtiers and *ulama* (“the learned men”) class is the main reason for Ottoman decline throughout his book.

Ziya Nur Aksun, another Islamist author, surprisingly deviates from Necip Fazıl as he completely ignores the Christian background of the janissary army. For instance the title he uses for the abolishment of the janissary army in 1826 is “The Sudden Abolition of The Janissary Heart: Our Long-Established Institution and the Strongest Foundation of the Ottoman Army” where he refers to the *Ocak* as a national establishment.<sup>210</sup> Adding the fact that his neglect of the issues regarding the devshirme system, princesses Olivera Despina and Mara, as well as his approach to Janissaries in the whole book *İslam Tarihi*, it could be concluded that Aksun tries to conceal the ‘ugly truth’ behind the Ottoman system and one is unlikely to expect from him a sophisticated analysis regarding the Ottoman history.

Furthermore, Rıza Nur unexpectedly writes nothing negative about the Janissaries in the section that he explains the establishment that occurred at the time of Orhan.<sup>211</sup> He simply states the new kanun that led to establishment of the Janissaries as an organized army. On the other hand, Rıza Nur’s approach to devshirme system that paved the way for Christians to become officials is extremely critical, unlike his stance on the janissary army.

Yılmaz Öztuna writes about the janissary army with a slightly negative approach. He believes that Serbs constitute an important part in the janissary

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<sup>209</sup> Kisakürek, N. F. (2001). *Yeniçeri* (8th ed.). p. 116.

<sup>210</sup> Aksun, Z. N. (1994). *Osmanlı tarihi : Osmanlı devleti'nin tahlilli, tenkidli siyasi târihi* (Vol. 3). p. 174. “Çok Köklü Bir Müessesemiz Olan ve Osmanlı Ordusunun En Kuvvetli Rükünü Bulunan Yeniçeri Ocağının Bağteten İlğası”

<sup>211</sup> Rıza Nur, & Kiliç, E. (1978). *Türk tarihi* (Vol. 3). pp. 161-163.

army who were selected from “the most perfect” boys of the region.<sup>212</sup> He describes the janissary army as the “heavy infantry force” of the “Turkish Army” that served to state throughout her history. Öztuna, like the plurality of the Turkish authors, does not believe that Janissaries were the force that made the most of the Ottoman conquests as many Europeans think.<sup>213</sup> The reason for this exaggerating attitude by the western historians, according to Öztuna is to develop hatred against the Turks with “killing Christians by using Christians” thesis. He ascribes a weaker role to Janissaries and promotes the forces that consisted of Anatolian Turkish soldiers as the main dynamic behind the rapid expansion. Just as Halil İncalcık argues that the number of soldiers should not be the primary concern for the comparison, Öztuna disagrees and mentions that at the heyday of the empire Janissaries total number were around 10.000, while Ottoman army’s number reached “hundreds of thousands”, therefore, “Janissaries could only be support units to the main army, hence; the real source of the Turkish army could not be found in the Janissaries” he writes.<sup>214</sup>

Regarding the importance of the Janissaries and *timarlis* in the Ottoman army, Finkel believes that timarlis continued to play the leading role in the rapid expansion of the Ottoman Empire, especially into the Balkans. This belief is something that Finkel obviously agrees with the Turkish historians who claim that janissary role in the conquest have been exaggerated by many western scholars. However, Finkel draws a line between the fighting force and the ruling elite as she indicates that Ottoman state relied more and more on devshirmes in its bureaucracy while the role of Turkish warrior families diminished<sup>215</sup>

#### 4.2.2. Devshirme Pashas

The number and highly influential nature of the devshirme pashas and ruling elite in the Ottoman Empire is a commonly dealt and discussed issue among the

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<sup>212</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 9). p. 351.

<sup>213</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 9). p. 251.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid. p. 251.

<sup>215</sup> Finkel, C. (2005). *Osman’s dream : the story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923*. p. 75.

historians from various angles. For instance, Finkel argues that the late fifteenth and sixteenth century's bureaucrats of the empire were of Albanian, Bosnian, Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian and Croatian origin. Also Yerasimos writes that 20 out of 24 grandviziers that took office from 1453 to 1566, the death of Suleyman I, were of *kul* origin.<sup>216</sup> In this sense, the term Osmanlı/Ottoman becomes a signifier for the educated ruling class and the servants of the sultan without any reference to ethnicity. However, it is also true that over the time the ruling class became predominantly of Christian-born and non-Turkish origin.<sup>217</sup>

At this point, Sina Akşin derives an idea from Ziya Gökalp and point out an interesting aspect of the empire. Gökalp compares the *enderun* schools with *madrasas*, where the first makes Christians the ruling elite of the empire, the latter makes the Turks Arabs. Akşin believes that it gives a significant idea about the nature of the empire which declared itself theocratic. While those from Muslim families cannot become administrators, Christian-borns could find themselves a place in the decision making process of the empire.<sup>218</sup>

Unlike the mentioned distanced and analyzing attitudes, Islamist and nationalist historians have a clearly negative stance on the issue of *devshirme* administrators. To start with Rıza Nur, it is possible to claim that he uses the *devshirme* system as the natural opposite of Turkishness. For him this system leads to ruling of one state by non-nationals which results in disaster.<sup>219</sup> These *devshirme* pashas, in Rıza Nur's conception, are in total betrayal of the empire. He states "whenever they found an opportunity, they would escape and turn back to their homelands and became Christians again. They taught the secrets of the state to the enemy. They surrendered the fortresses that they were supposed to guard. To sum up, their betrayals are infinite."<sup>220</sup> The reason for Turkish rise in the early period of the Ottoman dynasty was due to the validity of Turkishness, Turkish customs and spirit. But with the inclusion of the *devshirmes* and foreign

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<sup>216</sup> Yerasimos, S. (2001). *Azgelismislik sürecinde Türkiye: 1. Bizans'tan Tanzimat'a*. p. 305.

<sup>217</sup> Finkel, C. (2005). *Osman's dream : the story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923*. p. 75

<sup>218</sup> Aksin, S. (2008). *Kısa Türkiye tarihi*. Beyoglu, Istanbul: Türkiye İs Bankası Kültür Yayinlari. p. 11.

<sup>219</sup> Rıza Nur, & Kiliç, E. (1978). *Türk tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 219.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid* (Vol. 4). p. 90.

sultan wives corruption and indecency started. Those of bad stock with unknown or suspicious origins stood against the Turkishness becoming an effective clique in the palace.<sup>221</sup> Rıza Nur generally is not specific about the names and does not include much information about the origins of pashas; however, it is obvious from his usage of “Fatih the son of a *cariye* (concubine)” and extremely negative approach for devshirme pashas that he is highly critical and greatly emphasizes the anachronic Turkish ideals.

Necip Fazıl, too, agrees with Rıza Nur regarding the Ottoman decline due to appointment of Serbian, Vlahian, Greek and other Christian-born officers, who were by definition anti-Turkish, instead of Turks.<sup>222</sup>

Another historian that is critical about the devshirme system and its negative influence on the Ottoman Empire is Yılmaz Öztuna. He believes that the reign of Mehmed II is very significant in the establishment of devshirme bureaucracy. For him, Fatih’s support for devshirme bureaucrats was a “national sacrifice” in order to establish a central administration.<sup>223</sup> Öztuna divides the ruling elite of the empire to two factions as one being the “Turkish Aristocracy Party” (“Türk Aristokrasi Partisi” - TAP) while the opposing other is the “Devshirme Party” (“Devşirme Partisi” - DP) throughout the section he writes about Mehmed II and Bayezid II. It all starts with the “important warnings and objections” of Çandarlı Halil Pasha to Mehmed II who eventually became victorious; hence, in the right due to his conquest of Constantinople and struggles in the Balkans. This situation led to the execution of Pasha. This act, according to Öztuna is one of the greatest mistakes on behalf of Mehmed II.<sup>224</sup> It is his execution that made it possible for devshirmes, whose past and origins are suspicious or unknown, to become viziers and extremely influential for the state.<sup>225</sup> Öztuna, although not as much as historians such as Rıza Nur, İsmail Hami Danişmend and Necip Fazıl, is very critical with Fatih’s decision to support the devshirme bureaucrats in this

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<sup>221</sup> Rıza Nur, & Kiliç, E. (1978). *Türk tarihi* (Vol. 4). p. 99.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid* (Vol. 1). p. 164.

<sup>223</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 134.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*. p. 135.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid* (Vol. 2). p. 452.

sense. In this regard, Zuhuri Danişman writes along the same lines of Yılmaz Öztuna. For instance Danişman states that the execution of Halil Pasha is due to the efforts of devshirme viziers and afterwards they will occupy the most important posts in the Ottoman bureaucracy (“ihtida edenler tarafından işgal edilmiştir”). Also Danişman points out that there have been some successful devshirme viziers among many useless and worthless ones who even could follow their origins and betrayed Turkishness.<sup>226</sup> Overall, Danişman, though somewhat more sensitive, is among the historians that locate the devshirme system opposed to early Turkishness.

Furthermore, with the death of Mehmed II, Öztuna writes even clearer regarding the two parties (TAP and DP), as if they are modern political parties. For instance, when Mehmed II dies, (obviously Turkish) ‘Karamani’ Mehmed Pasha tries to conceal it but “the men of the DP” spreads the news immediately to exploit the situation. İshak Pasha from the DP immediately provokes the Janissaries and makes them kill his rival Karamani Mehmed Pasha. Zuhuri Danişman, too conveys these events with more or less with the same words, promoting “ethnically Turk, valuable statesman” Karamani Mehmed Pasha against the devshirme clique.<sup>227</sup> Eventually Cem, who was expecting to become the sultan, could not achieve this goal and so docile Bayezid II rises to throne with the support of the DP. Surely he was going to comply with their requests.<sup>228</sup> Regarding the killing of the Karamani Mehmed Pasha, Finkel states that it “clearly demonstrated that the janissary corps, created by the Ottoman sultans to be their loyal guard and the elite force of their army, was an unreliable monster which put its own interests before those of its masters”<sup>229</sup> which could be regarded as a credit to the historians that criticize the sinful acts of the Janissaries and devshirme pashas. The general outlook of Finkel’s narrative regarding the death of Mehmed II and the succession struggles that followed is similar to that of Öztuna who wrote somewhat moderately compared to Rıza

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<sup>226</sup> Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 4). p. 102.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid. p. 282.

<sup>228</sup> Öztuna, Y. (1977). *Başlangıcından zamanımıza kadar büyük Türkiye tarihi* (Vol. 3). p. 138.

<sup>229</sup> Finkel, C. (2005). *Osman’s dream : the story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923*. p. 82.



Nur, İsmail Hami Danişmend and Necip Fazıl. However it should also be noted that she does not underline the TAP and the DP schism too much but anyway it exists underneath the text.

Unlike any Turkish historian, Finkel openly writes about the origins of the grandviziers of Mehmed II. “Of Mehmed’s seven grand viziers, one was Turkish-born Muslim, two were Christian-born devshirmes, two were from Byzantine or Byzanto-Serbian nobility (Mahmud Pasha Angelovic and Gedik Ahmed Pasha) and one was Christian-born but of unknown origin” and “Mahmud Pasha Angelovic, a former Byzanto-Serbian noble, who built charitable and commercial institutions right outside Grand Bazaar today. The district was named after him”<sup>230</sup> writes Finkel. Apparently it is known for Turkish historians like, Danişmend and Öztuna that many of these grandviziers were of Christian origin. Although they do not give specific detail about the pashas<sup>231</sup>, as Finkel does, it seems at least there is an agreement regarding the fact that concerns their background. However, as it was his practice before, Ziya Nur Aksun deviates from the mentioned Turkish historians as he prefers to write about how a knowledgeable, pious and good Muslim Mahmud Pasha was but includes no information regarding his or other pashas’ ethnic background. Keeping in mind the Aksun’s general writing style, it is hard to think that this attitude is due to an Ottomanist and inclusive ideology. It could be claimed that he finds this kind of information dangerous because it might mislead Muslim Turkish readers and therefore does not incorporate such details into his narrative.

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<sup>230</sup> Finkel, C. (2005). *Osman’s dream : the story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923*. p. 57.

<sup>231</sup> Zuhuri Danişman is the only historian that writes about Mahmud Pasha and his origins among the Turkish authors. Danişman, Z. (1964). *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu tarihi* (Vol. 4). p. 250.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

The intention with the writing of this thesis was mainly to understand the differing perceptions among the popular historians with regards to the common histories of Serbia and the Ottoman Empire. Also, trying to observe the validity of the groupings of the historians was an important goal.

In the first chapter, which is concerned with the period of 1350-1475, significant events, such as; the Battle of Maritsa, struggles for supremacy in Anatolia, the Battle of Kosovo, the Battle of Ankara and the annexation of Serbia, were evaluated through the narratives of popular historians as well as literary works.

With a similar approach, in the second chapter, a reading and an evaluation of the eventful nineteenth century with regards to Serbia and Ottoman Empire was done. Especially authors' approach to the issue of nationalism and their reaction to gradual independence of Serbia were observed.

In the final chapter, prominent Serbian characters in the Ottoman history as well as devshirme pashas and Janissaries were in focus in order to derive a better image of Serbs in the Turkish popular historiography. By going over specific personalities and with a comparative approach, it was aimed to picture and locate these characters with more sensitivity in the common history of Serbia and Ottoman Empire.

In order to achieve the goals that were defined prior to writing and the research, the narratives of authors with differing backgrounds, namely; nationalist, extreme rightist, Islamist and leftist, were scanned and compared not only with each other but also with scholarly written works of the academics as reference points.

In doing this, specific attention was paid to subjects of nationalism (i.e. national terminology, ethnonyms, nationalist historiography etc.) and the nature and the structure of the Ottoman Empire during the given periods. For nationalism and

nationalist historiography works of Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Miroslav Hroch, Etienne Copeaux and Büşra Ersanlı Behar were utilized. On the nature of the Ottoman Empire, especially the early period, the framework and the approaches provided by Cemal Kafadar and Heath Lowry were highly useful.

It was quite interesting to observe how the history and historiography was deployed and instrumentalised, historical facts were omitted and modified. It was also seen, with concrete examples in the popular historiography, that the historical evaluation and narration could be done not as it is, but rather as it supposed to be,<sup>232</sup> especially with the impact of the nation-state idea and nationalism which were neither valid nor existent during the period that is in question. Hence the narratives of the popular historians, such as; Rıza Nur, Yılmaz Öztuna and Ziya Nur Aksun, become instructive lessons where the good and bad are shown to the reader without the needed discussion.<sup>233</sup>

Furthermore, as it was underlined in the beginning, the groupings were designed in order to evaluate the authors and have a more meaningful discussion. This approach helped a lot in understanding the rationale behind the erroneous information and misleading approaches as political engagements could indicate the real audience to whom the author is writing. For instance, while Ziya Nur Aksun, an Islamist author, is very sensitive (i.e. either selective or protectionist) in issues that could harm the religious feeling that is attached to the Empire or a sultan, rightist historians underline and glorify the Turkishness of the Ottoman Empire.

Overall, it could be beneficial to underline several problematic issues and arguments with regards to the popular historiography. An approach that could be formulized as ‘the nationalist distortion’ (“milliyetçi çarpıtma”) is appeared to be an all-pervading one, especially for nationalist, extreme rightist and Islamist popular historians.

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<sup>232</sup> Aslantas, S. (2007). *19. yüzyilin safagında Balkanlar : Osmanlıda Sirp isyanları*. p. 16.

<sup>233</sup> Göçek, F.M. in Kieser, H.-L. (ed.) (2006). *Turkey beyond nationalism towards post-nationalist identities*. London; New York; New York: I.B. Tauris ; Distributed in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan. p. 87.

Firstly, it is frequently observed that authors, such as, İsmail Hami Danişmend, Rıza Nur, Yılmaz Öztuna and Ziya Nur Aksun, either overlook or attach unnecessary negativity to the cases that Serbian existence was evident, even beneficial. This attitude especially materializes in the narrations regarding the struggles in Anatolia in the late fourteenth century, the Battle of Ankara (1402) and characters of Olivera Despina and Stefan Lazarević.

Secondly, the approach of ‘us, the Turks’ vs. ‘Serbs the enemies’ is observed which implies a direct connection between the armies and societies of the fourteenth century and those of the twenty-first century. In this regard Cemal Kafadar’s warning is notable. He states “[t]he essentialist trap cannot be avoided unless we, the historians, problematize the use of "the Turks" (or any other ethnonym for that matter), systematically historicize it and confront its plasticity, and study its different meanings over time and place”.<sup>234</sup>

Thirdly, none of the popular historians seem to grasp the state structure, vassaldom system and mosaic-like nature of the early Ottoman era. It is, almost without exception, indicated that Serbia was a monolithic entity that acted similar to a contemporary nation-state.

Also it has to be said that the lack of attention on behalf of the leftist historians is surprising. Especially Doğan Avcıoğlu is far from being international in the sense that the leftist point of view requires and his emphasis is solely on the Turks and the Turkish experience.

However; it was also seen that the particular issue that is in question and personal attachments of the author could make him deviate from the group that he was thought in the first place. In this regard two examples were striking. The first one is the deviation of Zuhuri Danişman who was thought to be in the nationalist group in the beginning. Yet his approach for and openness in the issues regarding the Serbs renders him a dissimilar figure. It is even possible to call him, maybe not with the contemporary standards but relatively speaking, a

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<sup>234</sup> Kafadar, C. (1996). *Between two worlds : the construction of the Ottoman state*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 26.

liberal historian. Secondly a divergence between two Islamist author, namely; Ziya Nur Aksun and Necip Fazıl Kısakürek became apparent. As mentioned, Ziya Nur Aksun has an extremely protectionist and glorifying approach to the Ottoman history. However, Necip Fazıl's general attitude towards the Ottoman administration, especially for sultans like Bayezid I, is accusive for not acting in accordance with the interests of the Turks and letting the foreign blood in which renders him very much in line with the nationalist group. That is to say, while the groupings are useful in making explanatory generalizations and understanding the general idea, it might also overshadow the diversifications.

It could be concluded that from this point onward a similar study for the post-1990s (i.e. post-Yugoslavia) historiography in the Turkish Republic on the common histories of Serbia and Ottoman Empire and even a survey that could deduce the average image of the Serb in the Turkish society could be conducted which would be a complementary one to this work in order to understand the impact that Bosnian War of 1992-1995 has made.

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